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## MACBETH : STRUGGLE AND DEFEAT OF THE MORAL WILL

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GAURI PRASAD GHOSH

[ This follows my essay on *Lear* in the last issue of this journal as the next link in the evolution of Shakespeare's tragic vision which I am trying to trace as part of a larger design to understand the development of Shakespeare's life-vision as a whole. This essay tries to show how the epic struggle of good and evil in *Lear* attains an extreme concentration in *Macbeth*, and how the almost absolute preponderance of evil and the almost absolute defeat of the hero's moral will lead to a pessimistic dead end and marks the termination of this phase of Shakespeare's tragic process. ]

### I. EXTREME CONCENTRATION OF ELEMENTS

*Macbeth* is generally supposed to have followed close upon *King Lear* and the two are connected by the dark thread of evil which runs through them, convulsing and upsetting the essential human values. Both present a deep sense of mystery regarding the source and the meaning of this evil ; both present what Shakespeare visualized as a titanic conflict between the forces of good and evil. But the mode of operation of this evil and the pattern of its interaction with the opposite forces are entirely different in the two plays. This difference, along with others, indicates a process which, as I shall try to show, takes the dramatist to an extremity beyond which this way of looking at evil could not be pursued further.

What strikes one most as one turns from *Lear* to *Macbeth* is a remarkable concentration of all the elements that go to the making of the tragic web. The plot is simplicity itself compared to the great tangle of events in *King Lear*. In the latter play, although Shakespeare weaves up the two stories from Holinshed and from Sidney in a masterly way, he uses the stories to create a double effect,

to present two closely similar processes which intertwine and reinforce one another. In *Macbeth*, on the contrary, the elements of the Macbeth-Duncan story and of the Donwald-Duff story are not only brought together but fused into a single process which flows on in one single course right up to the end.

The same process of concentration and deepened suggestion is to be found in the presentation of the two contending forces, the forces of good and the forces of evil. In *Lear* both the good and the evil elements are widely scattered : there are five decidedly good characters (Cordelia, Edgar, Kent, Albany, Cornwall's servant) and five thoroughly evil ones (Goneril, Regan, Edmund, Cornwall, Oswald), besides Lear and Gloucester who are basically good but commit disastrous errors of judgment and are finally chastened through suffering. This multiplicity of the contending forces is reduced to the barest minimum in *Macbeth*. There is one character alone—Duncan—whose goodness has been supremely emphasized, the others, including Macduff, being more or less colourless. Evil too has been concentrated to the utmost. Besides the outer evil represented by the Weird Sisters, whose significance we shall presently discuss, the human evil is concentrated mainly in the character of one person—Macbeth—and, secondarily, in Lady Macbeth. In the sources several noblemen including Banquo had aided in the murder of Duncan. In Shakespeare's play Macbeth and Lady Macbeth stand apart, separated from the rest of the community, as the sole repositories of evil. And after Duncan's murder even Lady Macbeth fades out and Macbeth remains the single focus of evil till the end.

But the most remarkable concentration lies in the compression of the struggle itself between the forces of good and evil. Doubtless there is a great inner conflict in *King Lear*—in the souls of Lear and Gloucester ; but the conflict that dominates the plot is the outward one, between the camp of good and the camp of evil. In *Macbeth*, on the other hand, although there is an external conflict, the conflict which arrests our attention all through is in the soul of Macbeth and in the soul of Lady Macbeth. In Lear and Gloucester the conflict is chiefly between rational and irrational impulses : the negative element in them consists in their arrogant misjudgment of people, not in any dark spot of evil intent. In the other play the central spot of evil

in the human world lies in the soul of Macbeth, within which also lie powerful forces of goodness : a heroic courage, a sensitive conscience and a noble imagination. Thus, the central conflict of the play is largely transferred from the outer world to the world of the human soul which itself becomes the great battleground of the forces of good and evil, of humanity and inhumanity. Thus the vast and diffuse conflict between the forces that sweep on wave upon wave in *King Lear* is in *Macbeth* condensed to a sharp focus in the soul of the hero himself. In *Lear* and *Gloucester* the conflict is essentially simple : both are basically well-meaning persons vitiated with a taint of authoritarian arrogance. In *Macbeth* the good and the evil, the virtues and the vices, are so strangely commingled, are present in such closely comparable proportions, that the conflict between them assumes a deadly intensity and the relative potencies of the two elements in the hero's mind remains a puzzling question.

## II. TWO EXTERNAL INFLUENCES : HUMAN AND SUPERHUMAN

The puzzlement regarding the precise nature of the goings-on in *Macbeth's* mind is all the more deepened by the fact that his mind is played upon by a powerful external force which has been presented as something ultra-human and the importance of which has been emphasized right from the beginning of the play. No other mature tragedy of Shakespeare, no other serious play of his, has a supernatural element in it as a major force. Even in *Hamlet* the ghost is a marginal presence. But in *Macbeth* the importance of the supernatural element has been indelibly impressed on our minds right from the first scene ; and if the first scene of a Shakespearian play does indeed strike its keynote, the 'Three Witches' in the first scene of *Macbeth* must be thought to represent the key influence operating on the tragic process sought to be presented in the play. And quite clearly, it is the supernatural suggestions, the prophetic greetings from the Witches, which set the psychological process in *Macbeth*—the soul of the tragic process—in motion. Doubtless, the startlingly rapid reactions of *Macbeth* show that the woodpile of evil ambition was already there within him unknown to the people around him. But, as some eminent critics have suggested, the impact of the Witches' prophecy was necessary to ignite it. That the power of the prophecy on *Macbeth's* mind is of an electric

nature suggests that without it the woodpile might never have been effectively ignited—which is to say that the supernatural soliciting, the influence of the Weird Sisters, was an *essential* factor in setting off and accelerating the criminal process in Macbeth's soul and, incidentally, the great spiritual struggle within it. Besides, the crucial nature of the influence of the supernatural on Macbeth's mind should be further evident from the fact that Shakespeare intends to convey precisely this impression by giving us that brief, menacing glimpse of the Witches with their deadly prescience and precise yet casual-seeming planning right at the opening of the play. Long before Macbeth himself appears on the scene his deadly tempters are presented as ready with their plans about him.

The other influence, a human one, that plays an important part in pushing Macbeth's already roused criminal ambition to the 'take-off stage' is that of Lady Macbeth. In her character too there is an undoubted basis of ruthless unscrupulousness, and she might very well have discussed the 'imperial theme' many a time with her husband. But again, what suddenly resolves her so inexorably to goad Macbeth on to grab the throne is the electrifying report in Macbeth's letter that the mysterious Weird Sisters have hailed Macbeth as Scotland's future king and that one of their prophecies has already come true. Thus the critical intensification of Lady Macbeth's ambition too, the further hardening of her heart and the further suppression of her feminine instincts — all of which provide Macbeth with the final push he needed to step forth into the river of blood — *are, ultimately, the product of the Witches' influence*. The influence of the Weird Sisters, thus, launches a kind of two-pronged attack on Macbeth: directly, and through Lady Macbeth who, too, like her husband, represents, though in a different proportion, human evil critically reinforced by the mysterious external agency of the supernatural.

### III. ALIGNMENT OF INNER AND OUTER EVIL

Thus the conflict of good and evil so 'cosmically' depicted in *King Lear* is here concentrated to an intense psychic focus as a conflict between good and evil, between conscience and 'vaulting ambition', the soul of man. And in this psychic battle between good



and evil, the evil element within man is critically boosted by a mysterious external force which is more than human. So, stripped down to its essentials, the process turns out to be a struggle between man's conscience and humanity and man's unscrupulous self-seeking as signally intensified by an evil influence lurking in the external world—whatever the exact nature of that influence might be. Not that man's 'conscience and humanity' stands alone, unaided by any external factors: there are considerable good influences and inducements. But they fail to match the deadly alignment of inner and outer evil. It would seem that, left in a world minus the Weird Sisters but with the other influences intact, Macbeth's conscience might have continued to hold its ground against his evil ambition. But the potent evil lurking abroad, now concentrating, now dispersing, but at each appearance imparting a tremendous momentum to the vaulting ambition in his soul, proved too much and turned the scales decisively to the negative side.

The whole process shows a transformation from good to bad, from humanity to inhumanity. At the beginning the positive already contains a strong germ of the negative, the good of the bad, the human of the inhuman; but the rapid and decisive dominance of the latter over the former comes about through the irresistible influence of the mysterious outer force: *this is the essence of the process*. The departures from Holinshed all show the extreme and unnatural nature of the transformations under the impulsions of this unnatural force. Holinshed's Macbeth was 'a valiant gentleman' but 'somewhat cruel of nature'. Shakespeare's Macbeth is introduced under a shower of universal praise. That is the purpose of the Bleeding Captain scene. Duncan's heart goes out to him in gratitude, admiration and love. Macbeth is in his late youth, if not middle-aged; and if that be the opinion about him, then, at least over all those long years, he must have acted in a way as to deserve it. His own wife, in spite of being aware of his ambition, describes him as too full of the milk of human kindness to be able to adopt cruel means. All these add up to form the impression of a man who, in spite of harbouring a guilty ambition, had been known to the world through his actual behaviour as a good and noble man—an impression strengthened at every step by the superlatives of praise and love showered upon him. That is to say, in spite of the evil

propensity lurking in his soul, *it is the goodness and the nobleness in him—his positive qualities—that had so long held sway*. And the whole business of the play is to show how that sway of goodness and nobility came to be drastically transformed into a sway of vicious, power-mad inhumanity under the terrible stimulus of a mysterious force brooding in the outside world which boosted the inner evil to such frightful dimensions that all Macbeth's goodness and nobleness and 'milk of human kindness'—in short, all his moral will—proved powerless to resist it and was prostrated under its unrelenting pressure.

The material from Holinshed has been wonderfully recast to create the sharpest contrasts and to emphasize the monstrousness of the acts done in such rapid succession by this apparently brave and noble and conscientious man— and thereby to suggest the deadly potency of the evil influence operating on him from the outside world. Shakespeare changes Duncan from an youth into an old man, from a weak ruler into an ideal monarch and a man of saintly disposition, transforms his two infant sons into two fine young men perfectly entitled to succeed their father on the throne, shows Duncan as overflowing with love and gratitude towards Macbeth and his Lady, and showering lavish gifts on them till his last waking hour and makes him a self-invited guest in Macbeth's castle where he is murdered in his sleep by his host and hostess— whereas in Holinshed the young Duncan of dubious reputation is murdered in one of his own castles with the aid of Banquo and others. Everything makes the murder in Shakespeare a most unnatural and monstrous act. It is clear from Macbeth's 'If it were done when 'tis done' soliloquy that he is most acutely aware of the monstrousness of the projected act. This awareness is again emphasized through that amazing (and inadequately understood) image that he uses while proceeding towards Duncan's chamber :

and wither'd murder  
 Alarum'd by his sentinel, the wolf,  
 Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace,  
 With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design  
 Moves like a ghost.

(II. I. 52-56)

in which he virtually describes his imminent act of murdering Duncan as a combination of murder and rape. But even that cannot stop this man of celebrated nobility from committing it—so crucial has been the intensification of the evil in him since his encounter with the Witches. That the references to his earlier goodness and nobility and to his 'milk of human kindness' are not mere exaggerated formalities but relate to a vital aspect of his nature is proved by the unparalleled spiritual profundity of his semi-soliloquy on the murder of sleep, the shuddering refusal on the part of a seasoned warrior to go back to the murder chamber, the tragic horror of one who had recently bathed in blood at the sight of his own blood-stained hands, and his fond wish that the knocking could wake up the dead Duncan and prove the horror and the disgrace no more than a passing nightmare. And yet all this sensitiveness of his conscience and all his capacity for rational analysis could not stop the crucial thrust of his ambition fatally charged with the influence of the Weird Sisters.

#### IV. LADY MACBETH WINS : MACBETH LOSES

The rest of the drama unfolds the progressively losing battle that Macbeth's human will—his conscience, if we like—fights with this double evil that goads him on. In a sense, while Macbeth's conscience loses, Lady Macbeth's conscience wins. Just as Lady Macbeth had shown virtually no glimmer of conscience while planning and helping in the murder of Duncan, so, from after the murder, at least soon after it, conscience or remorse or whatever one may like to call it, emerges with irresistible power and, by ceaselessly haunting her with the 'thick-coming' memories of those terrible moments, not only crushes out all her fiery ambition but takes away her sleep and drives her to insanity until she can endure life no more. Why? Because, however hard-hearted she may have been before, the haunting awareness of the things she had done troubles her soul, her conscience, so terribly that they unhinge her mind. That the memory of her evil deeds reacted so violently on her mind as to have destroyed all her peace and driven her to insanity indicates the victory of her conscience: a pyrrhic victory perhaps, but a victory all the same.

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Precisely the opposite process unfolds itself in the case of Macbeth : the progressive defeat of the conscience, of the moral will, in the face of the progressive intensification of his power-craze stimulated and further boosted by the influence operating on him from the outer world Shakespeare makes it his central business to communicate the peculiar rhythm of the conflict within Macbeth. The strangest thing about this psychic process is that Macbeth is a morally conscious criminal and that he continues on his evil course with the moral awareness of its being evil. True, the pitch of the moral awareness is not the same all through. It goes on dwindling as the criminal hardening of the heart increases ; but it is always there in some proportion or other right till the end. The conflict, the opposition of the moral will, is fiercest in the early phase, from the moment of hearing the third prophecy till the end of the murder scene. But even after that, though there is a decided dwindling of the active power of the moral will, its groans and murmurs and sighs are to be felt almost at every step of Macbeth's further advance on the path of crime. In the midst of his brilliant play-acting in the disclosure scene— his simulation of outraged innocence within a few moments of his killing of the grooms— he has the feeling that

from this instant,  
There's nothing serious in mortality ;

a train of thought which culminates in the 'To-morrow and to-morrow' speech, and the feeling that 'renown and grace is dead' which deepens into the realization :

And that which should accompany old age,  
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,  
I must not look to have.

(V. iil.)

Again, immediately following his diabolical eliciting of all necessary information from Banquo about his and Fleance's movements and his devilish instigation of the murderers against Banquo ( III. i ), he betrays in that marvellous scene with Lady Macbeth countless signs of a moral restlessness and a deep awareness of the evil nature of his designs which he expresses with a strange philosophical insight and in a somewhat sad tone :

Good things of day begin to droop and drowse,  
Whiles night's black agents to their preys do rouse.  
Thou marvell'st at my words : but hold thee still ;  
Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill.

What is most amazing and has always been an enigma to critics is that Macbeth comments and generalizes on his own evil propensities and designs like a philosophical third person pensively brooding on the course of evil in life. And in spite of having that fitful, if not continual, moral and philosophical awareness, he proceeds further and further on the path of evil.

So far he has proceeded on his criminal career with his eyes more or less open, i.e., in spite of knowing the course to be evil. But this moral awareness too he comes to lose at the end of the Banquet Scene. The terrible hallucination has been rightly interpreted as signifying the last major effort on the part of Macbeth's higher self, his conscience, his moral will, to deter him from further pursuit of crime by vivifying through his imagination the horror of his latest atrocity. But probably for the first time *Macbeth misconstrues this message from the depths of his soul*. When Lady Macbeth so tenderly (and so ironically) advises him :

You lack the season of all natures, sleep.

he replies that his recent hallucination

Is the initiate fear that wants hard use ;  
We are but young in deed.

That is, the recipe he prescribes for what he considers to be his weakness is more practice in crime. Which means that from now on he regards the stirrings of his conscience as a negative quality, as a weakness to be overcome through more extensive cultivation of what now appears to be the positive quality : ruthless violence towards all who might stand in his way.

This marks a significant stage in the defeat of Macbeth's moral will, and it is at this moment that he decides to seek further guidance from the Weird Sisters. It is the impulsion of *their* prophecies that has caused his lurking ambition to assume such huge

criminal dimensions. Now that the triumphant course of his crime has come upon a crisis, he again turns to the Witches for further inspiration. On that first occasion, as soon as the third prophecy had made him think of the murder of Duncan, he had to face the intense tremors of his conscience which would every now and then drown his criminal resolution. Now in the wake of the Banquet Scene debacle, he rejects the violent reactions of his conscience as a weakness and turns solely to the Weird Sisters for further guidance. It has been well pointed out that, whereas on the first occasion it was the Witches who had sought out Macbeth, it is Macbeth now who tracks these frightful beings down to their dark magic cavern. That he *can* find them out, that they are in fact waiting for him, suggests not only the deeper affinity that has grown up between them, but also the fact that Macbeth is now much more strongly in their grip than before. His bold, familiar way of addressing them further indicates his closeness with these instruments of darkness. It is to be noted that not a glimmer of Macbeth's conscience is to be found anywhere in course of this long interview. He eagerly swallows all the baits offered by the Witches. Only when the Witches vanish, exhibiting Banquo's long royal line does he show a suspicious resentment towards them and exclaims :

Let this pernicious hour  
Stand aye accursed in the calendar !

and

Infected be the air whereon they ride,  
And damned all those that trust them !

But, for all this, he clings and goes on clinging with increasing desperation to their last three prophecies. Such is their power that even after he sees Birnam wood coming towards Dunsinane, he clings to the last delusion of being invulnerable to any man born of woman. Clearly, all his actions and reactions till the end seem to be conditioned by these boosting prophecies uttered on the last occasion. While he had been acting under the influence of the earlier prophecies, he seemed to have some freedom of action. But after being subjected to the second wave of influence he seems to have hardly any freedom of mind left.

## V. THE LAST INNER STIRRINGS : WHAT THEY INDICATE

But though the course of his fall and degradation is now irrevocably settled, the inner conflict does not come to an end. If it had, the drama would have lost more than half of its profound meaning and its inexhaustible beauty. In the last phase of Macbeth's life, when the prospects are growing grimmer every day and his wife's insanity and the desertion of the thanes have left him in a world of total desolation, there is a revival of the groans and murmurs of his 'smothered conscience'. The moral feeling that he had discarded at the end of the Banquet Scene as a lingering weakness now returns — though only in feeble and futile flashes — and reveals a deep human meaning still lurking somewhere within his monstrous existence.

What do these brief flickerings of his beaten conscience or humanity (or whatever one would like to call it) appearing in the days of his worst degeneration indicate? What is their larger significance in this strange history of the transformation of a human soul? They suggest the enormously long way he has travelled from his earlier position, the incredible contrast between what he was and what he has become, the impassable gulf between his past and his present. It is to be noted that these last tremors of his crushed humanity are shown to appear at the very time when his extreme tyranny has been calling down on him the most extreme condemnatory epithets from his enemies, e.g., 'untitled tyrant bloody-sceptred' 'Devilish Macbeth', 'hell-kite' and 'hell-hound'. These expressions indicate not only his enemies' feelings towards him but also what his actions show him to be. And yet this man who is actually behaving like an inhuman monster realizes the presence of the 'rooted sorrow' in the deranged mind of his wife and suggests the use of 'some sweet oblivious antidote' that might

Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of the perilous stuff  
Which weighs upon the heart.

This man of monstrous deeds is 'sick at heart' on feeling that he has 'liv'd long enough', that his 'way of life is fallen into the sere, the yellow leaf' and that he has reached a situation in life in which he must not look to have

That which should accompany old age,  
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends

and that in their stead he is destined to have

Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath  
Which the poor heart would fain deny and dare not.

He also realizes the enormous contrast between his previous romantic sensitiveness and his present insensibility :

I have almost lost the taste of fears.  
The time has been when my senses would have cool'd  
To hear a night-shriek, and my fell of hair  
Would at a dismal treatise rouse and stir  
As life were in't. I have supp'd full with horrors ;  
Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts,  
Cannot once start me.

Even the last great speech is full of echoes of a profound realization of the change that has come upon him. The strange words :

She should have died hereafter :  
There would have been a time for such a word.

show his awareness of the unnatural state he has come to — a kind of life and a state of mind in which human emotions, caused by however intimate an occasion, can no longer have any place. And the rest of the immortal speech shows his passionate awareness that life has become for him a meaningless jumble which he would not be sorry to quit.

These beautifully conceived glimpses of a subtle psychic process unknown to the outer world seem to serve a threefold dramatico-philosophical purpose. First, they remind us powerfully and repeatedly — lest we forget and misconstrue — of what Macbeth once was known to be. On the one hand, we remember the numerous references to his nobleness and heroism : 'brave Macbeth', 'valour's minion', 'O valiant cousin ! worthy gentleman !', 'Bellona's bridegroom', 'worthiest cousin', 'My worthy Cawdor !' On the other hand, our minds flash back to the numerous expressions of his peculiarly sensitive conscience (speaking mostly, as Bradley has so beautifully put it, through the voice of his imagination) : his wife's very serious fear that he is



too full o' th' milk of human kindness,  
To catch the nearest way.

the deep moral sensitiveness revealed through the second half of the 'If it were done' speech, his profound awareness of the monstrousness of his fatal mission suggested in his (virtual) likening of himself to a murderer and a rapist at the same time (II.i. 52-56), and the terrible revulsion of his conscience immediately after the murder as specially reflected in his tranced exclamation on the murder of sleep, his horror at the sight of his blood-stained hands, and his tragically futile wish that the knocking might wake up the dead Duncan.

The second significance of these fitful puffs of moral anguish lies in the fact that they show that he is still — even in his degenerate state — aware of the long way he has travelled, of the terrible change that has come upon him, and that even in the midst of his ruthlessly ambitious pursuits he still has fits of anguished longing for the honourable life he has lost through his own actions, for his lost sensitiveness to the mystery of things, and for the rich meaning that life used to have for him before it became 'a walking shadow' and 'a tale told by an idiot'.

The third significance is that in spite of the fact that these rare gleams of conscience still haunt Macbeth's degraded soul and in spite of his being fitfully aware of the awful change that has come upon him, he continues on the path of murderous tyranny as though borne on an irresistible current. His 'bloody-sceptred' tyranny has, particularly after his second meeting with the witches, acquired a momentum which no flickerings of a lost conscience can arrest. In fact these flickerings reappear precisely at a time when his course has become totally irreversible, when he is already surrounded by overwhelmingly powerful enemies thirsting for his blood.

Macbeth's position, when he finds the English army approaching and his own warriors deserting him en masse, is hopeless. What is it then that still sustains him in his resolve to stick to the usurper's crown? Just despair? No, quite clearly it is the assurance provided by the witches' last prophecies. They have so thoroughly muddled up the mind of this supremely intelligent and imaginative

man that he clings to the fatal delusion of their prophecies till the very end. Even when his bid for the life of Macduff has failed and even when Birnam wood *has* come to Dunsinane, he clings to the last delusion of being invulnerable to any man born of woman, until Macduff's account of his birth shakes him out of it. Such has been the absolute power of the Weird Sisters over his soul.

#### VI. THE WITCHES : WHAT DO THEY REPRESENT ?

Shakespeare has made use of various ideas, beliefs and conventions — including plainly superstitious ones — prevailing in his time. But they have all been used to represent or to interpret life. And life, to Shakespeare, always meant *this* life, the here and the now, the life that he had come to know through experience (in the widest sense of the term) and through the faculties of imagination and speculation stimulated by experience. To take an extreme example, even the fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (apart from providing delightful entertainment) serve to interpret life. Their actions on the lovers' minds are in a large measure conceived as symbols for emphasizing the nature of the sort of appearance-based fanciful and youthful love that is 'engendered in the eyes' and is 'with gazing fed', and often 'dies in the cradle where she lies'. Shakespeare had travelled very far indeed from those rather happy romantic days ; but his mind continued to operate in the same 'esemplastic' manner, bringing together strangely different things to shed illumination on each other, to form significant patterns and thereby reveal the essence of some aspect of life. The witches in *Macbeth* whose influence tilts the scale of the hero's soul so fatefully towards evil represent the darkest of the current beliefs used by Shakespeare in the grimmest of his tragedies ; and they seem to provide Shakespeare with 'a local habitation and a name', with some sort of an 'objective correlative' for some of his most mystified feelings about the presence of evil in life as it had appeared to him in that climactic stage of his tragic vision.

To put it more plainly : does the mystery surrounding the witches correspond to Shakespeare's feeling of mystery about the nature and the source of the evil he found so overwhelmingly present in the life around him ? Was it a sort of bodying forth of the deep

sense of evil that had pained and puzzled Hamlet and reached its burning climax in the wild misanthropy of Timon and in the terrible mixture of anger, agony, loathing and puzzlement expressed through the scattered feelings of Lear, Gloucester, Edgar and Kent? The two great original studies of contemporary social conditions made by Camden and Harrison and the many later studies on the subject have shown how the break up of the feudal system and the anarchic growth of the new capitalist-toned economy (accompanied by the changes in the religious sphere) had, side by side with its unprecedented material glories, brought an unbridled spirit of self-aggrandizement, a naked greed, a ruthless grabbing spirit accompanied by a progressive upsetting of the cherished moral values. The whole spectacle, resembling the complex cross-currents and whirlpools of a river taking a great turn in its course, had puzzled many of the sensitive spirits of the age. Not only did the profound realist Shakespeare share this puzzlement; he probably felt it most deeply of all, and the course of his 'Tragic Period' shows that the sense of contradiction in life, the sense of a many-sided evil haunting man's life within and without had come to grow upon him. Shakespeare was not a shrewd philosopher-schemer like Francis Bacon who could cynically analyze the overall motions of this social whirlpool while remaining within it. Shakespeare was concerned mainly with the *human* aspect of things, with the nature of the fast-changing human relations emerging out of it all. A few years earlier he had shown a fine understanding of the socio-political structure of English medieval society and the human relations emerging from it. But *this* was not the middle ages which he could look at from a certain distance. This was that world of glorious human advance and diabolical human self-seeking with which he found himself deeply involved. Consequently, his profound humanism and his rather conservative sense of values came to suffer repeated shocks. True, he portrayed various aspects of the emerging human relations with profound insight and power. But why the emerging patterns should be so full of self-contradiction, why the glorious fabric of civilized human life should be so darkly tinted with evil and why these evil-haunted patterns should be so bizarre was a question that increasingly disturbed him.

*Shakespeare and Sophocles: A rather similar puzzlement seems*

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to have seized Sophocles in the later years of the fifth century B.C. when the river of Athenian society was going through a similar sharp bend. Aeschylus had exultantly watched and represented in his immortal dramas the glorious part played by his country in beating back the formidable Persian 'barbarians', and in teaching Greece and the world the superior justice and beauty of human social relations as represented by the democratic structure of Athenian society which had come to its final blossoming in his time. When Sophocles came to maturity, the transformation of Athenian democracy into an imperialist organization accompanied by an unprecedented money-craze and a ruthless spirit of self-aggrandizement was already under way—a process reaching its grisly climax in the massacre of the entire male population of Melos and the enslavement of all its women and children carried out by Athens, the celebrated saviour of Greece, the sacred home of democracy and the beacon light of culture. Sophocles, who was, like Shakespeare, a bit of a conservative and somewhat attached to the traditional human values, must have been not just pained but profoundly puzzled by this situation. It has been well pointed out that while Sophocles' personal life was a long stretch of happy prosperity, his tragic heroes and heroines are found engaged in dark and hopeless struggles with circumstance or destiny. And the darkest and most hopeless of these struggles with a destiny as inexorable as it is mysterious is to be found in the case of Oedipus. Somewhat like Shakespeare, Sophocles traces the pattern of his (and Jocasta's) terrible fall with amazing power and objectivity, but never puts a single comment on anyone's lips as to *why* things should have been ordained that way. The intensity of the vision suggests his awareness of an intense human predicament which passed his understanding, and it is difficult to avoid the conclusion indicated in George Thomson's profound comment :

'The *Oedipus* of Sophocles is a symbol of the deep-seated perplexity engendered in men's minds by the unforeseen and incomprehensible transformation of a social order designed to establish liberty and equality into an instrument for the destruction of liberty and equality.'

(*Aeschylus and Athens* 1966 paperback edn p. 340)

Perhaps it would not be wrong to say that Shakespeare is more like Euripides than Sophocles in *King Lear* while he is more like Sophocles than Euripides in *Macbeth*. In *Lear* evil is hydra-headed :

Regan, Goneril, Edmund, Cornwall, Oswald (apart from Lear and Gloucester with their extreme thoughtless arrogance)—all represent various facets and focuses of it. And, apart from all these human sources of evil, there are repeated and haunting speculations about the possible ultimate sources of this evil, about a scheme of things, a Providence, which appears to have designed this evil and invested it with such frightening potency. On the one hand, the manifestations of this evil have been portrayed with supreme objectivity. On the other hand, this objective portrayal is tinged with two kinds of touches of the passionately critical and the passionately enquiring spirit: (i) the stream of mockery pouring from the Fool's lips suggesting the strange depths of human viciousness and human folly and (ii) the innumerable agonized questionings about the meaning of it all coming from Lear, Gloucester, Kent, Edgar and Cordelia and reaching their climax in the terrible last question on Lear's lips:

And my Poor fool is hanged ! No, no, no life !  
 Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,  
 And thou no breath at all ?

In fact the play ends on this unanswered question—a blend of the helpless Sophoclean puzzlement and the passionate Euripidean questioning, with something overplus. Thus, at the end of *Lear* the whole mysteriously evil-haunted world-scheme becomes an object of pained and puzzled contemplation. That is, evil in *King Lear* is, ultimately, a kind of atmospheric presence, a tenuous toxic mist, enveloping all life. *It is this evil mist haunting life, perhaps, that Shakespeare presents in a more concentrated symbolical form in the image of the Weird Sisters.* The ultimate source of evil in *King Lear* is tenuous and untraceable. The witches are traceable *and* tenuous, visible *and* invisible, earthly *and* unearthly, concrete and yet diffuse. As the human evil, so widely scattered in *Lear*, is concentrated in the soul of Macbeth, so the atmospheric evil, the mysterious external source of evil in *King Lear* is concentrated in the dim, menacing figures of the Weird Sisters who appear to symbolize the evil influence on human life brooding in the world at large.

A mysterious Providence had ordained the tragic destiny of

Oedipus. Without sharing Sophocles' awe-struck belief in an inscrutable Providence, Shakespeare, nevertheless, casts the Witches in the role of a kind of destiny. His use of the term the 'Weird Sisters' following the expression used by Holinshed—'the Weird Sisters, that is (as ye would say) the goddesses of destiny'—also suggests this motive. He had realized the wonderful potential of Holinshed's description of them and presented them as three in number, suggesting the traditional image of the three goddesses of fate. But unlike Holinshed, he made the Weird Sisters the one concentrated source of the supernatural influence. In Holinshed Macbeth receives some of the prophecies from other witches and wizards; but Shakespeare makes the Weird Sisters the only instruments of darkness operating on the dark spot in Macbeth's soul. Yet another striking feature is that these dim, semi-visionary beings are represented as wholly evil, as 'instruments of darkness', as 'secret, black and midnight hags', to whom 'Fair is foul and foul is fair' and whose business it is to win the minds of people with 'honest trifles' to betray them 'in deepest consequence'. Thus they appear to be a kind of evil destiny lurking in the world unseen and waiting for opportunities to turn fair into foul.

The Weird Sisters, thus, appear to be the most vivid symbols of the new kind of evil, the puzzling hydra-headed evil born of the sharp transition from one kind of social order to another that Shakespeare's imagination was able to create. In only one of his tragedies, *Othello*, Shakespeare had been able to prevent the 'atmospheric pollution' by evil by keeping the evil confined mainly to one human villain. In almost all the other plays of the Great Tragic Period the evil is more or less atmospheric. Hamlet, Troilus, the Duke, Timon, Lear, Gloucester, Edgar, Kent—all keep on brooding on this strange encirclement of evil which appears to them to indicate the presence of a super-factor of evil, a factor lying somewhere beyond the pale of man's moral choice. The awareness of this atmospheric presence is most intense in *King Lear* and remains the great mystery till the end. In *Macbeth* too it retains its mystery, but it has assumed something of a shape, an elusive semi-human focus. This is the closest that Shakespeare could approach towards presenting an image of the bewildering evil that he found so omnipresent in the fast-changing social scene around him—just as Sophocles had

unconsciously expressed his bewilderment at the manifold evils sprouting forth in contemporary Athenian society during the years of its unbridled imperialist expansion.

#### VII. A DEAD END ?

The implication of the drama presented in *Macbeth* appears to be profoundly pessimistic ; much more so than it is even in *King Lear*. There is a vital difference between the moral and human processes unfolded in *King Lear* and in *Macbeth*. As Helen Gardner has so well put it (somewhere), *Lear* represents the process of the cleansing of a dark soul while *Macbeth* unfolds the history of the blackening of a relatively white soul. Through whatever misery and at whatever cost, *Lear* and Gloucester do attain a state of deeper moral and human understanding. Precisely the opposite process takes place in the case of *Macbeth*. From being a dominantly good man he becomes an overwhelmingly bad man. This culmination is brought about through a combination of the evil lurking within him and the evil influence ranging in the world abroad and vaguely imaged forth in the apparition of the Witches. *Macbeth* was by no means a weak man with irresistible evil instincts. Nor was he a hard-hearted conscienceless villain. He had an extraordinarily sensitive conscience, a fervent imagination and a fine judgment. True, a dark spot of evil lay buried within him ; but this dark spot might never have seen the light of day if circumstances had been different. But the circumstances, a wind of evil from the tortured social whirlpool, blew upon him, and its impact on the evil within him was deadly. Not all the poetic hypersensitiveness of his conscience, nor his keen power of judgment could stay him from stooping to one atrocity after another until he degenerated into a 'bloody-sceptred' tyrant. It is also significant that his conscience is not quite dead even when he seems to have reached the final limit of his terrible power-craze, but that this feeble survival can do nothing to hold him back. The battle had been between his higher human self, his moral will, on the one hand, and the deadly interlocking of his inner power-hunger and the outer social influence as represented by the Weird Sisters, on the other. The moral will struggled, but the odds, the alliance of inner and outer evil, proved too strong and overwhelmed it. As for Lady

Macbeth, if her later development represents a triumph of conscience over inhumanity, it is a barren triumph that leads to insanity and suicide. *Not one of the previous tragic heroes—Hamlet, Troilus, Timon, Lear, Gloucester—had finally surrendered to evil ; but Macbeth, their successor, does.* There is nothing vicious that this man, once universally admired, does not do till the very end. What greater and more decisive defeat could there be for man's moral will, and how could any more tragedies with man's heroic humanity, his moral will, figuring at the centre of it be written? Evil had decisively overcome the moral will and turned the rich life of the hero into a desert, taking Shakespeare's vision of evil-haunted reality to a dead end, to an impasse of impenetrable contradiction. *Macbeth* is the last Shakespearian tragedy typifying the titanic struggle of good and evil that had made its first appearance in *Hamlet*, and the two tragedies which follow it, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*, present neither any real evil nor any significant manifestation of the moral will.



*INTO SOMETHING RICH AND STRANGE :*  
*SHAKESPEARE, SHAKESPEARE-CRITICISM, AND*  
*THE TEMPEST*

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MANAS KUMAR RAY

(The present paper has been inspired by the belief that the works of Shakespeare form a single whole, and that the critics' unwillingness to come to terms with this has led to a dispensable distortion of the totality of perspective that, in our view, Shakespeare demands. After all, many partial perspectives have had their day. However, it is not claimed that a single paper can do justice to the theme. All that I have tried to do here is to suggest the possibility of an approach to the wholeness of Shakespeare's work as a study of man in the universe, and then to examine Shakespeare's last great masterpiece in the light of this perspective.)

PART I : INTRODUCTION

**Dialectics of Shakespeare-Criticism :**  
**The Renaissance Expedition Into Human Self**

Honi soit qui maly pense

(Evil to him who evil thinks)

—Motto of the Order of the Garter

The present century has altered the traditional assumptions on which Shakespeare-criticism rested. These assumptions crystallized around the dominant concepts of the post-Renaissance age: nature, and human individuality, with a special premium on its uniqueness. Comparative study of uniqueness is recognised as a method to relative understanding and judgment. By all means nature and uniqueness of individuality are valid values for criticism; for these carry independent, overriding significance and are therefore in many

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senses the determinants of value to measure up the achievements of art. But in the twentieth century a revolution has taken place in Shakespeare-criticism owing to a major shift that has occurred in the traditional concept of nature, or rather in the utility of the traditional concept, for in modern times we have realized that nature and reality are not equivalent terms and therefore not exactly the same concepts. Such a realization comes only when a previous concept has run its course, its usefulness is exhausted, and there is need to outgrow the basic conventions of criticism. At such a time a breakdown occurs in the structure of assumptions that govern the mode of purposive human inquiry. The whole psychology of criticism is altered to suit the need for a different kind of satisfaction. More richly suggestive lines of inquiry are explored and developed, and more inclusive critical concepts formed. In the present age the altered assumption behind the best Shakespeare-criticism is that of reality: neither nature nor the unique human individual. It is not that the individual is altogether ignored, far from it, but human personality does not remain as an end in itself. It becomes a device to relate the nature of man to the imponderables of a *deeply shifting* reality, employing a scale of literary criticism that relates character to the universe of a play. Correspondent to an awareness of a constantly shifting reality present to human consciousness since the de-stabilization of world-picture in the nineteenth century, the *deeper* reality of the Shakespearian universe is sought to be grasped by philosophical critics by way of understanding the matrix of fate and destiny, the shaper of the forms of human action; in short, the Shakespearian human estate, satisfying the deep, ever present urge of the human mind to move from darkness to light.

The passive form of the last sentence, as well as the emphatically reiterated adjective of quality—*deeper*—is deliberate. In the first place, a passive quality of the exploring critical mind is implied, which indicates an involuntary drive toward the kind of discovery it is fated to make. There is a certain amount of exploratory self-compulsiveness in the direction of the inquiry. We shall try to analyse the sources of this self-compulsiveness; in the meantime, we take note of the second area of the significance, of the comparative form of the adjective: what was once sufficiently deep darkens

out, as it were, on a sudden turn of the nineteenth century scientific screw, into the insufficient deeper. This announces certainly a sense of dissatisfaction if not desperation with the erstwhile relatively stable, positive state of being : the given positives of value (nature and human personality) which no longer suffice for the purpose of understading human reality in depth. The sustained critical efforts of Bradley and Wilson Knight—or of John Lawlor for that matter, a much later critic but in the same comet's tail—therefore take on the nature of an intellectual voyage of discovery, stimulated by a well-directed though not predetermined end in view. Part of this end was to penetrate the nature of reality in its bearing on man's fate. The necessity for this penetration arises whenever clear-sighted knowledge of man's role in the world becomes suspect and needs a re-formulation and re-statement. It became compulsive, therefore, to undertake the voyage, to survive over the strange seas of thought breaking on the human shore : in particular, to face the full consequences of a nihilism that swept away the universe and man in a metaphysical wind of nothingness as the imponderables of a deeply shifting reality were thrust upon human consciousness by the all too dazzling epiphany of science in the last century. This epiphany is ultimately paradoxical, as reason itself behaves paradoxically with man. Discovery of reason, and follow-up discoveries by reason, may shatter the framework of reality constructed by man and may, indeed does, create a philosophical void. But man is soon impelled out of the void by the development of a fresh system of ideas. The paradox of reason is that it destroys, when it is sufficiently deep-going, the structure of reality constructed by man and by that very fact forces him to react, to develop a new depth structure. In this way man's understanding of his place in nature gets deeper and deeper and wider. Onset of reason, demolishing the edifice of a religious universe, led to some such happening in the Renaissance, and after the achievements of the Renaissance were consolidated and stabilized, yet again in the nineteenth century. The mechanism of reason was responsible in both cases for the death and birth of ideas. In this way reason plays a subtle game with reality, which yields and does not quite yield itself up to human understanding. The grounds of the battle between reason and reality are forever shifting, and one never knows when and how to call it a day. But as I have said, there is paradox in this activity

finally a philosophical impossibility. For it fails to develop a system of subsumptive reference by which things exist in understanding. That means, nothingness cannot maintain itself steadily and for long. If it opens up a breach in the soul, it inevitably produces the opposite reaction to re-integrate what has been stabbed into, thereby completing the pattern of reason's irony and paradox in life. The re-integration does not occur at the same level as the breach, for the whole scope of the issue has been meanwhile widened and deepened, and resolution is accordingly attuned to a different scale, which, far from bypassing, takes in and goes beyond the state of philosophical injury. Nothingness is subsumed into a system, but is firmly *placed*. Newer versions of reality-system are composed, by way of defence against the collapse entailed by nothingness, by way of organizing, making centrally relevant, the new experience, the insights and responses, engendered by the crisis.

There is this need to organize, to develop a system of responses, which is expressed in the various systems of reality. It is no accident of the human spirit that in the trail of the nineteenth century a new beginning was made in the spate of system-building, which was designed to force reality into some recognizable mould. Some systems are total (Ernst Cassirer's, for example). These systems are attempts at re-definition of man's relation with nature ; more deeply, re-definition of man in terms of a changed reality. Nature and reality are not equivalent concepts : reality consists in the *discovery* of nature, and the interpretation of the ways in which it affects man ; more especially, *the way of understanding the sum of conditions existent for man*. If nature exists objectively, reality, a Protean concept, has a subjective-objective content, whose shape at a given point of time is determined by the nature and stock of human knowledge and the angle of perception brought to bear upon the stasis of a world (or nature) given to human consciousness. That means, as soon as the interpretation of nature changes significantly, the content of reality is changed. Its grounds are shifted, and older versions of reality topple. In the change from the age of mythology to the age of philosophy we may witness if we like such a shifting of the bases of reality. It is the general experience that grounds of reality shifted during the aftermath of science in the nineteenth century. Such a change, if we define it as progress, is progress apocalyptic and the history of man

is a continuous, long drawn out drama of apocalypse upon reality. In the Victorian scene of this perennial drama, a climax of rationalism was reached, which, to the man of average sensibility, had all the impact and forebodings of a catastrophe. To cover old ground, first came the geologic shock administered by Hutton, Lyell and company, which even the extraordinary sensibility of Tennyson could not absorb. In its wake came the thunderous shock of evolutionary biology whose truth was insufficient compensation for the damage done to the traditional self-prestige of the God-descended man, to the security of his anchorage in a well-assured *weltanschauung*. Both near vision and distant optics of reality were blurred and distorted; its focal point was simply lost in the blank stare of nothingness. If the effect was, in the words of Prof. Renwick, "eruptions and inundations on the theological and philosophical landscape",<sup>1</sup> by the time of Hardy, science had more or less completed its sacred task of smashing the forms of perceived reality. The solid universe of familiar perception was not only shattered and de-humanized by science; its sheer unresponsiveness to human hopes and aspirations brought in its wake a load of despair. If the solidity of the phenomenal world was melted and dissolved into atoms, the unseen atoms were practically a structure of nothingness, however invulnerably pregnant in their invisibility, and there was no ostensible connexion between nature and a hypothetical God who could give meaning and emotional support to existence. But rationalism had developed other methods of attack upon apprehensible reality than science. It had engendered a structure of society in which individuals were bound to feel like freely floating unmeeting human atoms, in search of cohesion and life and meaning. A burden of self-derived meaning was contrived in the Nietzschean role of the superman as it was in the ethical imperatives of existentialism, which were, in Kierkegaard's case, successfully keyed up to a search for God. But, for the majority, the sadly unromantic quest for meaning was to have been made from the rock-bottom of reality. For what was involved in the task of full comprehension was a fresh beginning *ex nihilo* with the nature of man, man in his naked naturalism, pitted in a friendly or uncaring universe; against reality and fate, struggling, winning, losing, and inevitably dying on the way.

The natural man, discovered by geology and biology, was a

spectacle of uneasy tension, for he did not fit any category and so could not be comprehended within available terms, even as the creative, ethical implications of new geology and biology could not be brought into focus clearly, far less rationalized. These have not been rationalized even today, in spite of all metaphysical speculation and system-building. Nietzsche, who saw through the disturbance, duly submitted his thesis of human responsibility now increased beyond measure, but the morality and endeavour of the superman have not become part of human ethic, while modern existentialism still remains problematical and experimental. In the nineteenth century, one result of the long and dangerously philosophical and unphilosophical vistas of thought opened up by science was the presentation of man as a tragic animal, and Hardy, who went to the extreme of speculating that thought might be a disease of the flesh,<sup>9</sup> faithfully saw to this aspect of the situation. At the same time, a systematic depth study of Shakespeare was launched as part of an effort to come to terms with the nature of man, to arrive at an integrated, comprehensive understanding of man as inheritor and disinheritor of the earth. Shakespeare, after all, appeared to be a systematic cross-examiner of reality, and if in the nineteenth century it was felt that the encounter between reality and man was unequal, it was also then poignantly tragic, and a clarification of the destiny of man was in order. We may even posit this attempt at clarification as part of an instinctive defence mechanism of man: the strength generated by knowledge and understanding of the human situation in the ultimate is its own defence against the strange forms of death scooped up by philosophical unconditionality. There was this felt need for the knowledge of man as such, taken at his fateful vitality and wholeness. Literature, in its concern with the vitally whole man, is the only discipline that serves this need, for no other discipline takes a more unified, concrete view of man, or that of reality in relation to man in all his immediacy. Hence, for the purpose of increasing man's knowledge of the man alive, a systematic pressure of attention was exerted on the Shakespearian (as well as, partly, on the Greek) drama, where could be discovered man's battle into and beyond nothingness, into and beyond the nihilistic void of uncondition. There arose therefore a felt need for an integrated approach to Shakespeare, and we find this attempt at integration demonstrated in

Dowden's study of Shakespeare's mind and art. Between the two covers of his *Shakespeare: A Critical Study of his Mind and Art* (1875), Dowden makes the first critical attempt to see Shakespeare as a whole. He is after an ordered view of Shakespeare, and since Shakespeare has a comprehensive grasp of human experience whose limits are defined by the two conflicting life-systems that met and clashed at the Renaissance, an ordered view in relation to Shakespeare means an ordering of reality that has still validity and meaning, since the frame of reality that was visualized at the Renaissance continued with modifications into the nineteenth century; and however dislocated the frame became at its joints in the mid-nineteenth century, it was the only known frame within which the search for value and meaning or any fruitful inquiry about man could begin. A whole paradigm of human life was felt to be embedded in Shakespeare, and the ethical conjugations of this paradigm needed investigation, if only to help understand the nature of man and his destiny. A connected account of the plays was needed, not the mere additive commentaries on individual plays, however brilliantly done by Coleridge and Hazlitt. Even the titles of the late nineteenth century works on Shakespeare and after—*Shakespeare: A Critical Study of his Mind and Art* (Dowden, 1875), *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist* (R. G. Moulton, 1885), *Shakespearean Tragedy* (Bradley, 1904), *The Moral System of Shakespeare* (Moulton, 1903) enlarged as *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Thinker* (1907)—give out a feel of functional wholeness of Shakespeare which is lacking in the approach of Coleridge's pluralistic *Lectures on Shakespeare* or of Hazlitt's *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*. Dowden's integrative critical approach, centred as much in the art as in the mind of Shakespeare, becomes a kind of anti-parable for the crusade of disintegration and uncertainty principle in the ethics of reality introduced jointly by science and the uncohesive society. Depth of the crisis, comparable to a fall from the Paradise, in one sense closed up Renaissance, for it was no longer possible to absorb any life-sustaining spill-over from the outmoded ideology, in contrast to the human society of the Renaissance which had absorbed, in a suitably modified form, some elements from the Christian ideology formed in the long Middle Ages which it was succeeding. The full implications of the Renaissance's total commitment to reason were unfolded only in the nineteenth century rationalistic crisis.

If Shakespeare and Hardy stand at the two extremes of the human society of the Renaissance, they define and delimit two separate, terminal areas of human tragedy possible within the paradox of rationalism. Shakespeare's grasp of the human problem was deeper, for he penetrated beyond the paradox of rationalism in its destructive role to its ironic creativeness and so was able to look beyond the tragic sky. Hardy, on the other hand, only suffered the destructive paradox. As the tragic sky loomed large over his head, the relevant function of completed, creative irony, unguessed at by him, was taken over by literary thinkers and system-builders. They were busy re-constructing out of the collapse of reality reflected in its full-blooded human aspect in the Hardyean tragedy and were thus putting an end as best they could to the crisis. This phenomenon, in its split between a literary vision of destruction and the philosophically reconstructive cognition of a superior order of reality, is in striking contrast with the poetic, that is, unified grasp of Shakespeare. The act of unified, poetic comprehension which sheds, or may shed, light on a new epiphany in all its destructive and creative implications and thus render it intelligible to us is in the modern age separated out into two complementary vocabularies of critical idiom (system-building) and literary vision (Hardy), like some stereophonic music whose parts have become divided in order to throw the immediate tunes into sharper relief. Shakespeare offered the unified poetic grasp of the Renaissance, when modern rationalism started its autonomous career, while the full crisis of the nineteenth century rationalism and the rationalistic society had to wait for its poet till the arrival of T. S. Eliot of *Four Quartets*. The tone of poetic grasp of reality in *Four Quartets* is understandably different from that in Shakespeare's work seen as a unified creative whole. The critics may demur at the suggestion that the astonishingly varied Shakespeare plays, cast in so many different dramatic genres, offer a unified creative whole and operate within a single frame of perspective. I believe that they may be said to be so unified in that the plays are, more or less, explorations from a single point of departure in the Renaissance-Shakespearean mind. That point of departure is the image of the man uprooted from the earth, as lodged in the Renaissance sensibility despite all the formulations of Protestant philosophy which traditionally inherited the image of God's man. We must



make a distinction here between the surviving tentacles of Catholic cosmology naturally existing in a play or the plays as the given vocabulary of thought, but essentially and ideologically looking backward in its dealing with the problem of man, and the sensitive groping toward the image of a new man almost entirely thrown back on himself, braving the consequent struggle toward evolving a new language of human ethic. The distinction is not very subtle, though criticism has not shown clearly how to draw the line of distinction. One result of this has been to see Shakespeare as being wholly rooted in the ideas of his age. These ideas, we are told, come from the essentially medieval Catholic world-view based on the three firmly interrelated orders of cosmos, man, and body politic, and these and other cognate ideas clashed with the Renaissance scepticism and naturalism. The clash is responsible for tragedy but the order is always asserted and comprehended in terms of the Macro-micro order of the divinely structured universe. Theodore Spencer (*Shakespeare and the Nature of Man*, 1942) has given the best systematic account of Shakespeare's probing of the nature of man in the light of these ideas.

To come back to the distinction: was Shakespeare writing in terms of the two exclusive, conflicting views of man that emerged and clashed at the Renaissance? Or do we find in Shakespeare the picture of man struggling through the good and bad of both these conflicting views to a new dispensation which, to anticipate, can be claimed on the side of a largely rationalistic faith? The former, while leaving the conflicting ideas utterly unreconciled, involves examining the plays of Shakespeare in terms of certain concepts that formed a large part (but by no means the whole) of the intellectual vocabulary of the age: and the methodology of criticism is at par with that of scrutinizing the plays with some other concept of the age, say melancholia or humour, the range and sweep of the concepts determining the range and sweep of the criticism. One can always get some result from this kind of thematic criticism. But its untenability becomes apparent when we realize that this approach necessarily excludes *any consideration of the form of the action* as means to meaning and with it the still larger areas of the territory of response which must be brought to bear upon our comprehension of the plays. The form of the action changes from play to play, very

significantly, and we have to speculate upon their significance before we can arrive at relatively *fuller* understanding of Shakespeare. The form of the action, not to be confused with the formal concepts of tragedy and comedy, is determined by the mode of perspective upon the spectacle of human life obtaining in each play, and is as dynamic from play to play as the dramatic action within a play is. The changing form of action in Shakespeare's plays gives us, we believe, a different story of man, a different image of his, emerging through, while duly reflecting, the whole Renaissance debate about the nature of man.

If the somewhat schematic account of human nature read by Theodore Spencer in Shakespeare is true — it is true within its limits, but the question is whether we can accept these limits as carrying any ultimate sanction — then our interest in Shakespeare would be very much an archaic interest. With Shakespeare no more than inheriting a very much dated theory of man based on a still more dated Christian mythology, our interest in Shakespeare should have waned with the passing of the Elizabethan age, or at best would have remained only historical. Far from this being so, our interest has in fact begun to be vital, curiously, ever since the triumph of rationalism in the eighteenth century, when Shakespeare came to be discovered for the first time as it were, so that we may even hazard the conclusion that men bred on rationalism has a stake in Shakespeare which is not paid up by the cosmo-theogonic world-view of Renaissance Christianity. If his plays give us satisfaction and assurance, they are certainly not of the Church — Militant or Triumphant. More important than this argument is the fact that on Spencer's showing, we are bound to identify the Shakespearian good with man behaving according to the medieval laws of ecclesiastical polity and evil with man as he really is, liberated by Renaissance scepticism and naturalism from Christian orthodoxy. Progressive thinkers of the age, men like Montaigne and Bacon, could well take as their motto that famous, oft-quoted speech of Edmund's in *King Lear* :

This is the excellent foppery of the world, that, when we are sick in fortune, often the surfeits of our own behaviour, we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and stars ; as if we were villains on necessity ; fools by heavenly compulsion ; knaves, thieves, and treachers, by spherical

predominance ; drunkards, liars, and adulterers, by an enforc'd obedience, of planetary influence ; and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on —an admirable evasion of whoremaster man, to lay his goatish disposition on the charge of a star !

(I. ii. 119 ff. All quotations and line-numbers from Shakespeare are from the one-volume Alexander edition)

Edmund's individualism and egoism are, as Spencer says, certainly evil, as his words are in their context since he uses an excellent and irrefutable argument to pursue evil ends, but that is a different issue altogether. Edmund presents a right scientific attitude here, although, exploited for a wrong end, and to say that presenting Edmund in this light is a way, even a dramatic or Shakespearian way, of condemning the unfettered rational man wholly misses the nature of the human and philosophical struggle in *King Lear*, as well as the true import of art as a form of knowing. The whole post-Renaissance development of human morality, starting right with Protestantism, has been precisely to avoid the 'admirable evasion' which lays one's goatish disposition to the charge of a star. The full responsibility of human achievement and endeavour was placed squarely on the shoulder of man, and if this necessitated man's wrestling with his own nature, well, the whole Shakespearian world is a picture of just such a wrestling which only draws to a close, I believe, with *The Tempest*. But to take the argument from literature to life : were Montaigne and Bacon, whom Edmund is voicing here, propounding evil in the world through their influential discourses ? Was Shakespeare in his deep artistic self an arch-reactionary who waged a losing battle against the thinkers who carried the days with them ? Do the Shakespearian plays run counter to the dominating, life-enhancing tendencies of the Renaissance ? Or is there a different explanation possible of the Shakespearian good and evil, a different way of regarding the apparently rationalistic evil in the Shakespearian universe ?

Spencer's methodology very sharply throws into focus the old problem of historical relativism in literary interpretation and I cannot but here circumvent the whole issue somewhat dogmatically after having pointed out certain dangers in regarding Shakespeare solely in terms of the ideas of the age. Spencer's is a beautiful attempt to elicit an image of man in terms of the conservative Renaissance ideology, but being limited by the historicism, we cannot from his

approach trace out the lines of human struggle and development that we feel are there in Shakespeare's plays as a whole. And the historical approach, if true, is logically bound to prevent a later age from finding its own kind of satisfaction and meaning in Shakespeare. An author who is solely contained by the ideas of his age goes out with his age. He cannot really serve the emotional and intellectual needs of a different age, but since Shakespeare has served these needs, we conclude that other approaches to Shakespeare, say formalistic, mythopoeic, psychological, or Wilson Knight's 'spatial', are aesthetically more viable than the historical one. It is this that validates Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy* against the historical-realistic school's attack. Shakespeare study in the critically germane period of the last quarter of the nineteenth century was prompted by a deep urge in the age's psyche for a statement on human life that could prove satisfactory to the man tottering on the precipice of nothingness. Naturally, therefore, a vista is opened on the tragic front, which undercuts the felt reality of nihilism and at the same time gives meaning to human life. For the emergence of final good through the working out of evil is immediately reassuring after the necessary tragic price has been paid for this perception, and an age unsuitable to the re-creation of tragic form may nevertheless make do with visionary analysis of the tragic pattern in writers still considered to be in the mode. The tragic view of Bradley arises out of the metaphysical despair of his age and its deep need for faith, and as such is a crystallization of the age's instinctive reflexes before the prevailing welter of nothingness. Bradley's view of Shakespeare is thus in dialectical relation with his age; and as in philosophical analysis of matter, the variable forms of things are given identity by the perceiving eye and so may be said to have owed its existence to perception there and then, so does Shakespeare. He is as he exists in critical-imaginative understanding, and the discovered perception, dialectically oriented, has perhaps a superior claim to validity than any other, since it very precisely catches Shakespeare where he, speaking across his age, is more ultimately valid. It is not that the so-called Elizabethan world-picture is entirely irrelevant to our understanding of Shakespeare or of his age; but it is a sort of negative counter at best and does not tell us the whole truth, probably not even the most important aspect of truth as regards the meaning of Shakespeare to the twentieth century. For the really

important point is that the settled world-picture was destroyed by the emerging tensions of the age and replaced with a new cultural ethos. The Shakespearian vision, while reflecting and giving shape to, the darkly brewing, inexorable life-tensions of the Renaissance, the 'hell-broth' and the 'brave new world', attempted to assess and explore the nature of human possibility in this new cultural ethos. The sponsors of the Elizabethan Shakespeare have wholly missed the point of man's evolutionary self-struggle toward a new order of society and morality such as we find in any clash of the ages, and such as we find in a Shakespeare play, which reflects the very heart-throb of the Renaissance.

Shakespeare, as I have said, gave the unified poetic comprehension of the Renaissance, and I should dwell on some implications of the statement. The disturbance in the human order which gives birth to the depth-drama of the Shakespearian kind arises, as is commonly acknowledged, out of the clash of the ages embodying the clash of two opposite world-views. *King Lear* is taken as the clearest example of this clash. In so far as the clearest example is also taken to be the only example, this view, as Theodore Spencer shows, is clearly inadequate in relation to Shakespeare as a whole; for the very possibility of tragedy and all forms of human disorder in the Shakespearian drama arise out of the *inadequacies* of the life-systems based on these two conflicting world-views. The point needs some stressing. The disorder-motif in a Shakespeare play is not a result of the *mere* clash of two opposite views of nature embodied in the heroes and villains. In a clash, the stronger view, the stronger party, if it is that strong, sooner or later prevails, with some loss to itself perhaps, but not with any kind of Pyrrhic victory, not with the utter destruction of both good and bad alike that we find in the Shakespearian tragedy. The Shakespearian disorder becomes possible because neither world-view is completely invulnerable, fully adequate as a life-system in humanity's onward march with and to his destiny. It is because both have their weak points that the clash ends in disaster. The clashes in *The Faerie Queene* between the heroes and the villains do not rise to the proportions of tragedy because for Spenser the Christian-chivalric ideal was a complete, adequate life-system. Granted this argument, proper understanding of these mutual inadequacies will help us to realize the nature of the

Shakespearian achievement in the comedies, the problem plays, and the final romances. It will require a whole book, several books perhaps, to work out all these ; within the scope of these prefatory remarks I can only suggest that the Shakespearian drama, by and large, is poised on a tension of the possibilities of human nature realizable within these unfortunately contrary views. Both *Macbeth* and *Othello* may be interpreted along this line, not to speak of *King Lear*, while *Hamlet* is only apparently a much more complicated case, for there the hero recognizes both kinds of possibilities within himself and without, and his superhuman attempt at reconciliation of opposites ends, in practical terms, in failure. But it is this interaction of opposites—flowing from different life-systems and held in creative tension toward a higher order of emergent but as yet unrealized possibility—that becomes the governing principle of the dramatic universe of a Shakespeare play. The opposites clash as a mode of thought and imagination and are comprehended within a wider field of understanding like the tenor-vehicle relationship embodied in a metaphor. The metaphor transcends both the tenor and the vehicle in an area of tensive fusion and the truth of metaphor exists in a poetic dimension which has nothing to do with the individuated tenor or the individuated vehicle. Same is the case with the Shakespeare play. The intense poetic life of his play emanates from a profound study of the implications of full-scale rationalism and the other vision of a non-rational light : poetic insights made available to imagination by the very contingency of rationalism. Rationalism is a healthy impulse, necessary and natural, but when, on the ethical plane, it is pushed to an extreme, it becomes dangerously exclusive and inhuman, thereby necessitating an extra-human ethic as the base of life. The rational and the poetic thus coexist in the articulated vision of the play, simultaneously illuminating each other's nature in a single act of unified comprehension. Since two different kinds of value are brought to bear on each other, determining the very *modus operandi* of the poetic imagination, a unified comprehension of the Renaissance is arrived at, more illuminating than the rationalistic theology of Hooker, more instructive than the life and thought of Bacon.

I propose further to enlarge on the concept of rationalism in its bearing on the Shakespearian world, particularly the tragic world

where the accents of human experience are far sharper than in the other plays. These other plays are no less authentically 'experienced', by Shakespeare at different levels of sensibility, and are no less relevant to the developing integration of the Shakespearian vision. But they are of a different experiential status and can be better grasped if we provisionally isolate the tragedies as a special group where the issues involved are much more radically highlighted. The tragedies occur, in the first place because the 'new philosophy'—an achievement of rationalism—'calls all in doubt', placing man in a condition of spiritual unconditionality, giving short shrift to the orthodox Christian view, to which this unconditionality is unaccommodated and unaccommodable. That means, man's adventure into evil is not Satanic but existential; it is a part of his self-exploration and self-expansion programme, even though it is certainly barbarous and self-indulgent. Since there is no middle term between reason and faith (except possibly doubt, but doubt has no final place in the Shakespearian scheme), self-indulgence in evil in the Shakespearian world must be affiliated as a philosophy of conduct to rationalism, in which it is theoretically possible to uphold pure selfhood as a principle of life, albeit a bad principle. In pure rationalism selfhood is seen as an ultimate sanction; the very reason why it is so vociferously condemned by religion which sees ultimate sanction as God. (Opposed to God, Satan, incidentally, may be regarded as the first rationalist adventurer.) All culture of the self is a rationalist activity.<sup>3</sup> Now indulgent selfhood is a quality that can be predicated of all the major Shakespearian villains—Claudius, Iago, Edmund, Macbeth and provisionally, in a way, Lear; for Lear too wears the mask of a villain when he expels Cordelia from his kingdom for her failure to gratify his ego.<sup>4</sup> This self-indulgence, except in Lear's case, is linked to a desire for self-expression, a seeking and a promotion of self in this wide world which is taken for granted as ultimate. This is the rationalist adventure: man uprooted from the soil of faith, is cut loose to himself and so must ferret out his place in the world. Excepting this self-indulgence, self-finding and self-expression are the concern of the tragic hero as well, though the tonal emphasis in this regard will vary from play to play. Hamlet is more concerned with self-finding, Othello with self-expression, Macbeth with all three, and Lear with self-knowledge. In this culture

of the self, one may easily go wrong, for acting without the extra-human controls set upon him by a consistent and inclusive world-view, man is really beginning anew with the world and has as yet no set ethical standard to measure the value of experience. The only rub to this view is probably Hamlet. He is steeped in the rich human tradition and this gives him a sense of value. He is therefore an inheritor and not a discoverer of the world, and the whole burden of the human past is upon him, including the religious burden of man. But he projects his life-work as a fresh endeavour, a fresh struggle on behalf of a *dispossessed* humanity, betraying the Eliotian sense that the "end is where we start from"<sup>5</sup>, since a radical break with the past has occurred: "Time is out of joint, O cursed spite, / That ever I was born to set it right." The unconscious death-wish in these lines—the wishing away of the whole self—is really a recoil, out of a sense of personal inadequacy, from the superhuman task of bringing in a new dispensation. This sense of the newness of the required human endeavour is not the only sense of newness that Hamlet betrays; it is accompanied elsewhere in the play with as it were a new recognition of the face of man made from the viewpoint of an unaccommodated and uncommitted observer: "What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! how infinite in faculties! in form and moving, how express and admirable! in action, how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals!" (II. ii. 305ff)<sup>6</sup> Both the tragic villain and the tragic hero are therefore explorers in a world newly discovered and consecrated to them. Since man is naturally subject to error and may make a wrong choice, the path of self-discovery that may or may not lead up to self-knowledge is strewn with tragedy. The very fallibility of man ensures that, swooping down upon the good and bad alike, combining them in a collective endeavour of friction and sending them to destruction. Of course the nature of fallibility will vary from the hero to the villain, calling forth very different ethical judgments, but human fallibility seen in this perspective explains why the hero is called upon to contribute to his own ruin; it is all part of the human game that is simply not always won when the game is played according to the rules of the world. In the Shakespearian theatre, fallibility is a perpetual present tense concept, and is contrasted with the Christian concept of the Fall—where fallibility antedates experience—since the whole issue of human falli-



bility is scuttled in the presumed submission to Christ. The hero contributes to his own ruin because he is acting upon no supernatural light which alone can eliminate error, but upon the natural light of reason, and if experience pushes him toward recognition of some supernatural provenance, as in the case of Hamlet, that is a form of the hero's, or generically speaking, man's evolution, an act of discovery. This discovery belongs with the same level of reaction to experience as the translation of the world into a cosmos in Othello's very naturalistic outcry wrung out of the depth of his heart: "It is the very error of the moon; / She comes more near the earth than she was wont, / And makes men mad."<sup>7</sup> Hamlet need not have made that *discovery* of circumambient Providence if he had already started from God as an accepted major premise of human experience;<sup>8</sup> this in spite of his knowledge of the everlasting fixing its canon against self-slaughter shown in his first soliloquy where his soul-pangs come from an attempted failure to integrate the self with the world. We need not at this stage speculate upon the reasons for this failure of integration. The point is that, like any other tragic hero or villain, self is where he starts from. Hamlet and Othello, Macbeth and Lear, have not framed their experiences upon specifically religious premises, though they may occasionally move toward a religious position as they take the plunge into the world of experience. They were impelled to find the bearings of self in a world set large before them; and they do find their bearings, to different ends and destinations, but not before they have forged out certain values, humanistic or religious, derived from experience. Shakespeare projects his world as a theatre of experience, and in this world good is as much self-generated as evil, and the heroes wring good out of evil. Both arise from the order of nature.

The fallible nature of human self operating freely and necessarily upon the world and deviating into evil and tragedy is, I think, a more reasonable explanation of the contingent tragedies in the Shakespearian world than any mystical theory of evil in the universe. It helps a lot in bringing down the idea of tragedy from a vague metaphysical realm to that of the known and the knowable. The suggested approach dispenses at once with the necessity of assuming a universe that is divinely structured in any special sense, making both tragedy and comedy possible (that means,

neither is theoretically inevitable) in a unified view of the long term human situation. And it specially renders possible that unique literary form—tragicomedy—where the distinctions of the tragic and comic forms collapse. The plays work out human destiny in terms of man's self-development ; behind this operating the terms of nature, bringing on tragedy if necessary, but not as an absolute form of life, so that it is not even finally desirable to describe the Shakespearian world in terms of tragedy or comedy. The terms of human development as set forth by Shakespear trace out certain important though hitherto unsuspected thematic lines that are very much there in the plays, cutting across the frontiers of individual plays, binding together the whole Shakespeare canon as a more or less single structural unit.

One such thematic line on which several plays meet is the very *contingent nature* of human reality, or—what is really the same thing—the differingly contingent nature of human inadequacy as man launches his struggle with the world from different strategic positions. This is a basic Shakespearian theme that has so far, I think, eluded full critical attention, obscuring some main aspects of the development of the Shakespearian vision. The elusoriness is due to our approaching these plays in terms of the rather formal concepts of tragedy and comedy. Hamlet fails, Othello fails, and in their complementary failures they sum up a whole chapter on human inadequacy which is certainly tragic in the short run but which in the long run yields a different kind of meaning ; for tragic fate—an important aspect of truth - does not adumbrate all the aspects. And as far as Shakespear's visionary struggle with human truth is concerned, *Hamlet* and *Othello* represent a chapter that is closed ; accordingly, the tragic experience is muted into a different key in *King Lear* and *Macbeth*. A fullness of personality has been showered upon both Hamlet and Othello, and denied to Lear and Macbeth, who are differently programmed, the sensibility of Hamlet and Othello imaginatively signifying a cul-de-sac for human personality development. It is not possible to go beyond them in the specific direction of their sensibility : they embody two different, opposed ideals of human perfection, two contrasted of strategies of humanness, two opposite modes of proving human excellence in the two areas of body and mind that make up human life. The superiority



of Hamlet and Othello is sufficient to cope with any contingency of human experience *before* the screw is turned upon the frame of things in their personal world, when an unsuspected depth of reality yawns up before which they simply do not know what to do and how to proceed to find their bearings. Hamlet habitually manages the world of experience by an imaginative-intellectual grasp of things. The bent of his sensibility is philosophical, and it abhors what is merely physical, explaining why he so utterly fails to understand his own mother who, for him, moves wholly on the moral or spiritual level of being. Similarly, the ghostly *discovery* bringing in its wake a ghoulish *peripetela* of reality (to use Aristotle's terms in an un-Aristotelian way), makes him conscious of the more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in his philosophy, along with a tormented sense of the absent Anagnorisis, which makes him lose all grip over reality. Hamlet comes into self-possession when he reaches the awaited Anagnorisis in his perception of the hand of Providence behind his tragic fate, but by then he has moved to a higher self than his previous earthly-philosophical one.<sup>9</sup> His intellectual self has already conceded defeat in its inability to domesticate the depth reality, and consequently in its failure to solve the problem of revenge on the physical level.

This failure of Hamlet—a failure of his whole self—is behind the seemingly unending process of dilly-dallying in which he is caught, and which never solves for him the problem of revenge. Hamlet never takes his revenge. The problem of revenge is solved rather by Shakespeare, through the imposition of that pattern in the carpet of human action, the design of Providence which is transcendent of human will and is therefore to be seen as a dramatic resolution of an impossible human theme, drawing together the different threads of action into the fifth-act carnival of death. The validity of Hamlet's experience of Providence cannot be called into question, but the idea of Providential control of human affairs, if pressed too far, will make nonsense of human ethic, robbing action of the significance of human will. Shakespeare himself seemed to recognize the ethical dangers involved, and never again directly repeated the idea of Providence, except, significantly, in *The Tempest*, through he employed the idea of controlled action, divested of any Providential significance, in *Measure for Measure*. Providence does not help

examine the nature of man, and in *Othello*, which is significantly linked with *Hamlet* in its exploration of the opposite human potential, the idea of Providence is eliminated altogether. The terms of tragedy arising from the vortex of action and reality are wholly human. This is an important stage of development in Shakespeare; the development comes of an exclusive desire to concentrate on the nature of man as such, beating out his path in the world which is his home. *Hamlet* demonstrates the inadequacy as well as the imaginative beauty of man in his angelic gift of apprehension. *Othello* takes up an opposite position to that of *Hamlet*. The idea of complete intellectual sensibility which nevertheless fails is replaced with the idea of complete physical excellence which in its turn fails. Othello's *élan*, which can tackle any contingency of experience on the physical level (the point of the story of romantic adventures that so fascinated Desdemona), is grossly inadequate to tackle things on the intellectual plane, thereby bringing on tragedy. Together Hamlet and Othello write out the completed chapter of human inadequacy, the tragic inadequacy of man. *King Lear* and *Macbeth*, with their changed conception of the hero, do not cover the same tragic ground. In spite of the heavy tragic overtone, the informing ideas of these plays point to a different direction.

Though we are at present talking of only two of them, in almost all the tragedies excepting perhaps *Macbeth*, the factors that are responsible for appearance of cracks in the heroes' world are, we should note, human factors: Gertrude and Claudius in *Hamlet*, Iago in *Othello*, who are solely governed by the constricting reasons of self, very worldly and rationalistic motives. Here are then, in each play, two human worlds in interaction at cross-purposes, throwing up a depth-crisis of reality and bringing up for consideration a question of the ultimate in man's reality perception. The question in any final form was, however, subtly disallowed by Shakespeare himself when he shifted his tragic ground from the more things in heaven and earth of *Hamlet* to the more things in earth of *Othello*. This shift is made possible because the ultimate in the *Hamlet*-world—Providence—is not the ultimate in the Shakespearian conception at this stage of his visionary development; the kind of experiencing that takes man towards a perception of Providence is not the only mode of experiencing possible. The world of each

play is a conditional world, and aware of the relativity of perspectives upon reality, Shakespeare, required by the solidly unspeculative character of his hero, projected a different, complementary world in *Othello*. In spite of the apparently absolute and ultimate nature of the depth-crisis which the tragic hero faces in a play, it is not really absolute and ultimate, for the crisis exists only in relation to the specific set of human situations obtaining in each play. The situations are uniquely independent variables and not given absolutes of human relation (which they are in Greek tragedy), so that our perception of human tragedy in Shakespeare is a contingent perception, based on the differing contingency of human inadequacy from play to play.

The notion of the human situation as independent variable of human relation that we derive from Shakespeare's plays is not a fortuitous conception ; it is a factor that allows him to shift his dramatic ground from play to play, enabling him to discover, develop and complete the vision of man ; and it is a factor that offers, as a mode of tragic procedure, the strongest possible contrast with Greek tragedy. Greek tragedy does not admit of the accidents and variables of human situation : the base structure of human relations rests on a permanent foundation of Necessity, the inviolate physico-moral laws that govern the universe, and each character exists in relation to some aspect of Necessity. Zeus's law or Necessity is therefore present behind the Greek play as a finality of philosophical conception, so that we may even describe the ultimate structure of the Greek tragedy not as one of human relations *per se*, but of the relation of man with Necessity. A Shakespeare play is not geared to any such finality of philosophical world-picture, Elizabethan or otherwise ; in it the casting together of personages (in the royal court which is the spring-board of action) has all the apparent accidentality and indeterminacy of life. That means, they do not exist in relation to some far off, unsuspected, divine law by which the human society moves ; rather, if we are to take a philosophical view of the very plasticity of their inter-relation, the unpredetermined nature of their relation argues, in the long view, some kind of emergent evolution where, we should realize, no holds are barred from play to play ; where in fact, each play, rooted in the immediate and tending toward the beyond, is a consideration of some problem of human behaviour,

some aspect of reality, with a deeply cumulative bearing on the argument about man. The plays are, abstractly speaking, a continuous, developing chain of metaphoric arguments about man, an explorative analysis of human potential, till a final visionary assessment and a summing up of the human spectacle in time is made in *The Tempest*.

In order to present *The Tempest* in this light, it is necessary to reorientate the usual terms of analysis of the earlier plays in the canon, including the notion that Shakespeare was writing in the rather static formal categories of tragedy and comedy. The trouble with these formal literary concepts is that they bring on all the philosophical implications of the 'genre' theory, forcing us to stop short at the local genre perspective of each play, and preventing us from seeing the plays together as an extended artistic whole. The genre theory thus obscures the elements of continuity in the diverse plays,—tragedies and comedies—the continuity of the basic Shakespearian quest for the nature and destiny of man as he struggles on through a pre-divine, naturalistic to a humanly experienced Providential or divine world. Considered as an isolated group, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Lear*, and *Macbeth* would seem to work out an absolutely final tragic view of life, whereas, in our view, the total Shakespearian corpus as such discountenances this. The meaning of these plays in the context of the total corpus is bound to be different from the one each play has when considered in isolation as an exclusive whole. There is in fact involved here a plurality of meaning-levels in which a play may exist, and a choosing of one level for another for the purpose of understanding and interpretation. I cannot overstress the value of the relative meaning of a play from its relative position in the corpus: if the larger body of the corpus, taken roughly as an integrated whole, is seen to have some unifying, informing theme which runs over and beyond an individual play, then the meaning of that play in relation to the larger order of the corpus-theme must needs be discovered, and it will be, we suppose, a fruitful discovery, or at least a worthwhile attempt, bringing fresh perception to bear upon plays that seem to have been explained out. If we consider *Hamlet*, or *Othello*, in terms of itself only, it is not, theoretically, possible to discover the unity of Shakespeare's visionary quest for and struggle with reality

that binds the two plays together. Admittedly, the unity here is the philosophical unity of opposites, of a common light shed upon a human problem from opposite angles of observation, but having recognized the fundamental unity of quest, we are inevitable led on to the related questions : where does the quest end ? where does mankind after all arrive ? These questions take us ineluctably beyond the restricted precincts of an individual play to the larger whole of the corpus itself, plotting a curve of human development certainly not as clear as the radical terms 'tragedy' and 'comedy' would appear to signify. The point is that this sort of questioning seems verily to lie embedded in the unconscious poetic drive of Shakespeare's genius, determining the modality of a play's existence, and therefore a purely formal analysis of the plays in terms of plot and character would not take us very far into the heart of Shakespeare's development : it would not show us, for example, the contingency of the Shakespearian tragic world and the significance of that contingency in any meaningful, creatively linked passover from tragedy to comedy and vice versa when both tragedy and comedy are "Endeavours of Art" toward some final human truth. We have to make a choice between regarding the tragic and the comic worlds as utterly disparate and discontinuous, and regarding them as different parts of a bigger organic whole.

( *To be continued* )

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. W. L. Renwick, *English Literature, 1789-1815*, O. U. P., 1963, p. 40.
2. See Hardy's *The Return of the Native*, Macmillan, 1958, Book Second, Chap. 6, p. 162.
3. Instinctive animal activities of man do not come up to the level of culture. And while theoretically aesthetic or religious culture is not possible without the use of reason, it is not, strictly speaking, culture of the self in any narrow sense as it has a communicative lunge forward away from the ego.
4. Pace Elder Olson. See his comment on the first scene of *King Lear* in his *Tragedy and the Theory of Drama*, 1961.
5. Cf.     What we call the beginning is often the end  
          And to make an end is to make a beginning.  
          The end is where we start from.

*Four Quartets*, "Little Gidding", 11. 214-16.

6. Cf. Theodore Spencer, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man*, Macmillan, New York, 1945, pp. 99-100. To Spencer, this passage on microcosm describes "the natural hierarchy in the technical language he (Shakespeare) could count on his school-fellows to understand". (p. 100) About this passage and the immediately preceding lines in the text of the play, he says: "...both his (Hamlet's) two interlocutors (Rosencrantz and Guildenstern) and the audience would have understood Hamlet's magnificent generalizations more richly than we do, since they had been trained in the same beliefs as his own."

Hamlet's paean of man may conceivably embody "the natural hierarchy in technical language", but it does not necessarily follow that the responses of Shakespeare's audience to these passages would have been more rich than ours, presumably because they would have the pleasure of recognition of familiar ideas. On the one hand, it is quite possible that a traditional image and a traditional vocabulary which Spencer says are in these passages might well engender a stock response among Shakespeare's audience, making the response far less rich than ours; on the other hand, the appeal of these passages to the modern reader is undeniable, and part of this appeal may be precisely due to the fact that the modern response is salutarily free from the inhibitions of a received ideology to make possible a direct and fresh discovery of man and earth as it were.

7. I use here the term 'naturalistic' advisedly, proleptically, because the root Latin meaning of error (deviation from the right path) is very much involved in the present speech of Othello, which posits a cosmic disorder in the order of nature.



8. What I mean is that Hamlet's experiential journey in the play does not start with a strong sense of God working in him, even though he is a devout Christian in faith. His starting point is a world that has tumbled down, in spite of all the paraphernalia of civilization and religion in the state of Denmark. Denmark is rotten, the world has collapsed, and Hamlet is cut loose from all moorings to himself. Except at the very end of the play when he defies augury since he now realizes that there is a special Providence in the fall of a sparrow (V. i. 211-12), nowhere else does Hamlet sustain himself with faith. This living faith is for him a hard-won discovery, and the whole lifetime of his experience goes into it. We should remember that initially Hamlet is a student of the University of Wittenberg, not the theologian Origen, that what he faces is a secular, not a religious crisis, and that in his attempts to tide over the crisis, he ends up in, but does not start from, a living sense of God.
9. Cf. Georg Lukacs' statement on the nature of tragedy in general : "The essence of these great moments is the pure experience of self." See the essay entitled "The Metaphysics of Tragedy" ( p. 156 ) in *Soul and Form*, by Georg Lukacs, Merlin Press, London, 1974, translated by Anna Bostock.

This is a book I read long after I had completed the present paper, but I feel emboldened to see that my point about a tragic hero receives some general support in the writing of a great thinker. So I add this note as postscript.

The book, belonging to Lukacs' pre-Marxian period, should also be read entire for its analysis in depth of the varied significance of form in literature. Incidentally, I may be allowed to quote one particular comment : "Form is the highest judge of life. Form-giving is a judging force, an ethic, there is a value-judgement in everything that has been given form. Every kind of form-giving, every literary form, is a step in the hierarchy of life-possibilities : the all-decisive word has been spoken about a man and his fate when the decision is taken as to the form which his life-manifestations can assume and which the highest moments of life demand."

## NATURE AND ART IN SHAKESPEARE

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D. C. BISWAS

Great Nature is man's final term of reference in Shakespeare. Even in the depth of melancholy Hamlet appreciates the splendour of the firmament. 'When I love thee not', says Othello, 'chaos is come again'. He would not sell Desdemona for 'another world / Of one entire and perfect chrysolite'; he swears he will be as constant as the icy current of the Pontic Sea. Lear reads in the pitiless storm an irony of justice: 'Judicious punishment! 't was this flesh begot / Those pelican daughters'. Leontes in his delusive fancy insists that if his suspicion of his wife be nothing, then 'the world and all that's in't is nothing; / The covering sky is nothing'. Macbeth feels that his kingship would have been as 'whole as the marble, founded as the rocks, / As broad as the casing air', could Fleance have been killed. And to escape terrors that afflict him he would 'let the frame of things disjoint', 'nature's germens tumble all together': a self-destructive egoism!

This repeated reference to Nature in human contexts implies that Nature is the standard by which human action is to be judged. Right from classical times down to the Renaissance and even thereafter, Nature has been regarded as a symbol of right reason. For Plato, Cicero and for most Renaissance moralists to follow Nature meant to conduct oneself according to law and reason. Nature too was often coupled with Art, which itself is an imitation of Nature; and the two terms were almost as inseparably associated in Renaissance thought as 'heredity' and 'environment' in modern Social Psychology. These terms which had varying significations received ultimate meaning and precision in relation to the Elizabethan idea of an ordered universe: Nature and Art pointed to what appeared to be a real division in man's experience of himself and the universe.

The interaction of this philosophical idea which began with the pastoral romance may be traced back to classical antiquity, for

example, in the Greek romance, *Daphnis and Cloe* ; but the unique kind of cross-fertilization which occurred in the Renaissance issued in a unique kind of great poetry : Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* and Andrew Marvell's pastoral verses. The long debate over Nature and Art in the midst of the pastoral episode in *The Winter's Tale* indicates the interest that people in Shakespeare's time took in the philosophical aspect of the matter. But pastoral is by definition implicitly concerned with the discrepancies that may be observed between rural and urban, country and courtly, natural and artificial, simple and complex. And it is in this wide perspective that the present essay aims at understanding Shakespeare's attitude to Nature and Art.

Before coming to Shakespeare we should try to define the terms Nature and Art as the Renaissance understood them. The distinction depended on whether man himself or man's view of the universe was being considered. With respect to man himself Nature meant the instinctive and the spontaneous, and Art implied the voluntary or conscious ; and with respect to man's view of the universe Nature meant the work of God, and Art meant the work of man.

We now turn to the crucial debate over Nature and Art in *The Winter's Tale*, in which ultimately Art is identified with Nature, ( 'Art itself is Nature' ), which is symbolically represented in the play by the supposed statue of Hermione coming to life. The debate had its relevance in the sphere of horticulture, an art widely studied and practised in the age ; whether experiments with gillyflowers for altering colour etc. was justified was a living question of the day.

Per.                Sir, the year growing ancient,  
Not yet on summer's death nor on the birth  
Of trembling winter, the fairest flow'rs o' th' season  
Are our carnations and streak'd gillyvors,  
Which some call nature's bastards. Of that kind  
Our rustic garden's barren, and I care not  
To get slips of them.

Pol.                Wherefore, gentle maiden,  
Do you neglect them ?

Per.                For I have heard it said  
There is an art which in their pinedness shares  
With great creating nature.

Pol.                Say there be.  
                  Yet nature is made better by no mean  
                  But nature makes that mean. So, over that art  
                  Which you say adds to nature, is an art  
                  That nature makes. You see, sweet maid, we marry  
                  A gentle scion to the wildest stock  
                  And make conceive a bark of baser kind  
                  By bud of nobler race. This is an art  
                  Which does mend nature—change it rather ; but  
                  The art itself is nature.

Per.                So it is.

Pol.                Then make your garden rich in gillyvors  
                  And do not call them bastards.

Per.                I'll not put  
                  The dibble in earth to set one slip of them ;  
                  No more than, were I painted, I would wish  
                  This youth should say 't were well, and only therefore  
                  Desire to breed by me.

IV. 4. 79-103

Polixenes argues that Nature makes the means by which Nature is improved, i.e. when we say that Art perfects Nature we do in fact mean that Nature perfects herself. For example, the art of grafting itself is governed by Nature, i.e. it is Nature, not the gardener, that says when and where the operation is to be performed, and it is Nature again that carries the sap from the wild root into the cultivated branch that has been grafted. Polixenes' speech 'we marry / A gentle scion to the wildest stock' etc. contains a dramatic irony ; for, in fact he has come to oppose the kind of union he is now advocating. And Perdita on her part agrees with him on this point, though she remains unconvinced on the question of gillyvors, i.e. improving Nature by Art.

Polixenes here echoes the opinion of classical critics from Aristotle to Longinus and the Renaissance theorists dependent upon him : that Nature is itself Art (the art of God) and that art is natural being subject to the same laws as operate in Nature. Plato had lumped together Nature and Art in depreciating painting and poetry as inferior forms of imitation ; and the term gained currency in less pejorative contexts from Aristotle's famous dictum that Art imitates Nature, but it is Horace's passage, quoted below, that

seems to be the *locus classicus* for the Renaissance attempts to explain poetic talent on the level of abstraction :

'Tis now inquir'd which makes the nobler verse,  
Nature, or Art. My judgement will not pierce  
Into the Profits, what a meere rude braine  
Can ; or all toile, without a wealthie veine :  
So doth the one, the others helpe require  
And friendly should unto one end conspire.

*Ars Poetica.* Transl. Ben Jonson.  
*Ben Jonson* ed. Herford and Simpson,  
VIII, 331-33, II. 581-86.

Puttenham, in *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589) sums up the orthodox position thus :

Arte is an ayde and coadiutor of nature, and a furtherer of her actions to good effect, or peradventure a meane to supply her wants, by reinforcing the causes wherein she is impotent and defective, as doth the arte of Phisicke, by helping the naturall concoction, retention, distribution, expulsion and other vertues, in a weake and unhealthie bodie. Or as the good gardiner seasons his soyle by sundrie sorts of compost.....and prunes his branches, and unleaves his boughes to let in the sunne...And in both these cases it is no small praise for the phisition and Gardiner to be called good & cunning artificers.

*The Art of English Poesie,*  
ed. Willcock and Walker, p. 303.

So, Art perfects and complements Nature. 'The best illustration,' says Aristotle in the *Physics*, 'is a doctor doctoring himself : nature is like that' — the illustration that Puttenham also cites. And though in the context of the gardener's ingenuity Puttenham says that Art 'in some sort a surmounter' of Nature, he clings to the traditional notion that ideally the two terms should work together.

Ben Jonson's exhortations to naturalness are accompanied with admonitions, not to abandon art, but to use art to conceal art :

The true artificer will not run away from Nature as if he were afraid of her, or depart from life and the likeness of truth, but to speak to the capacity of his hearers. And though his language differ from the vulgar somewhat, it shall not fly from all humanity with the Tamerlanes and Tamer-chams of the late age, which had nothing in them but the scenical strutting and furious vociferation to warrant them to the ignorant gapers. He knows it his only art to carry it, as none but artificers perceive it.

*Timber*, ed. Schelling, pp. 26-7

Spenser in his *Amoretti* expresses the conventional paradox that the effects of Nature and Art are indistinguishable :

What gulle is this, that those her golden tresses  
She doth attire' under a net of gold :  
And with sly skill so cunningly them dresses  
That which is gold or hair may scarcely be told ?

Amoretti. XXXVII.

Nature and Art receive an emphasis in Ben Jonson's elegy on Shakespeare contributed to the First Folio (1623), where he deals abstractly with the poetic talent :

Yet must I not give Nature all : Thy Art  
My gentle Shakespeare, must enjoy a part,  
For though the poet's matter Nature be,  
His art doth give the fashion.

Jonson's eulogy exemplifies a position approximating that of Horace : Nature and Art in fine balance, complementing each other and contributing together to the making of poets and poetry. It is the position of the orthodox moral philosophers of the Renaissance, with whom Polixenes is in perfect agreement. Other aspects of Art (here Fine Art) arises from the Statue scene in *The Winter's Tale* : Art in general, any human skill applied to constructive end is justified by Polixenes' assertion : 'Art itself is Nature'. The alleged statue by Julio Romano 'who, had he himself eternity and could put breath into his work, would beguile Nature of her custom, so perfectly he is her ape : he so near to Hermione hath done Hermione that they say one would speak to her and stand in hope of answer' — is an instance of human skill seeking to copy nature, not to mend it. So the artist, like Apelles in Lily's *Campaspe*, is Nature's ape, applauded for his verisimilitude. Here the idea of Art is not so lofty as that of Sir Philip Sidney, who if he called it 'second nature' stressed its idealizing power as superior to Nature since 'her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden'.

Now the question is : was Shakespeare of Polixenes' view, which is the view traditionally held by most Renaissance theoreticians or did he side with Perdita, whose view of the superiority of Nature over Art echoes that of Marlowe in *Tamburlaine* : that true Beauty is indescribable ?

What is beauty, saith my sufferings, then ?  
 If all the pens that ever poets held  
 Had fed the feeling of their masters' thoughts,  
 And every sweetness that inspired their hearts,  
 Their minds, and muses on admired themes ;  
 If all the heavenly quintessence they still  
 From their immortal flowers of poesy,

\* \* \* \* \*

Yet should there hover in their restless heads  
 One thought, one grace, one wonder, at the least,  
 Which into words no virtue can digest.

*Tamburlaine*, Part 1, V. 2.

This view of the superiority of Nature over Art was advocated in the seventeenth century by one Italian writer, Emanuele Tesauro, to whom it appeared that Nature, the art of God, must be superior to that of the fallen man. Before attempting to understand Shakespeare's view, it is necessary to analyse the term 'nature' in all its Renaissance implications.

## II

Theodore Spencer in his book *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man* has shown how the council speech of Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida* based on the familiar concept of the great chain of being determines the patterns of Shakespeare's thought. Taking a cue from Theodore Spencer, R. C. Bald<sup>1</sup> in his essay published in *J. Q. Adams Memorial Studies*, 1948, has indicated that the speech 'adumbrates nearly all principal situations of the play' (*King Lear*): 'the prerogatives of age and of crowns are denied and the bond cracked 'twixt son and father ... the storm is no more symbol but ... a symptom of the universal disharmony : macrocosm and microcosm interact on one another'. Significantly, Ulysses has also made known how far the image of order has been lost and disregarded : the Greeks have forfeited the dream. And Thersites discovers a general sickness in the Greek camp :

Most wisely hath Ulysses here discover'd  
 The fever whereof all our power is sick.

Nature is a keyword in *King Lear* denoting the regulating principle not merely in human relationship but within the cosmos as well.

When Gloucester describes Edgar as an "unnatural, detested, brutish villain—worse than brutish!", the collocation of adjectives is no accident. Edgar's imputed treachery is in defiance of nature. This depravity from which Edgar is of course free infects Goneril, Regan, Edmund and Cornwall. The repeated references to the lower animals and man's likeness to them have been catalogued by A. C. Bradley. It is significant that in the agony of disillusionment Lear should call down universal destruction on mankind :

And thou, all-shaking Thunder  
Smite flat the thick rotundity of the world  
Crack nature's moulds, all germins spill at once  
That make ingrateful man !

*King Lear*, III. 2. 6-9.

It is no expression of fury of a passing moment, but its reverberations have lingered on ; and as if, in reply, Albany's prophecy to Goneril comes as a partial reassurance.

The nature which contemns its origin  
Cannot be bordered certain in itself :  
She that herself will sliver and disbranch  
From her material sap, perforce must wither  
And come to deadly use.

*King Lear*, IV. 2. 32-6.

One of the great motifs in Shakespeare and also of Milton, is the overthrow of Nature, physical nature being stubbornly involved in the moral world ; and the supreme correspondences between man and nature are expressed in *King Lear*. Hamlet, sword in hand, remembers natural affection :

Soft ! now to my mother !  
O heart, lose not thy nature ; let not ever  
The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom.  
Let me be cruel, not unnatural.

*Hamlet*, III. 2. 365-8.

Laertes accepts natural feeling as a cue for action :

I am satisfied in nature  
Whose motive in this case should stir me most  
To my revenge.

*Hamlet*, V. 2. 223-5.

The concept of nature behind these passages played an important part in the development of European thought. It originated in the early stages of the Greek philosophy, was given prominence by



stoics and in the phrase *ius naturale* had dominated all medieval speculation on the organization of society.

In natural law is expressed the dignity and power of man, and thus of his reason, which allows him, alone of created beings, to participate in the rational order of the universe. This explains the stress which is laid in the Thomistic philosophy upon the ideas of reason and order (*ordinato*), which in turn are developed in a complete and elaborate philosophy of law.

A. P. d'Entrives : *The Medieval  
Contribution to Political Thought.*

Pp. 21-22.

Man occupied a central position in the scale of being, midway between the divine and the inanimate. His superiority over the rest of creation consisted not only in the possession of reason but also in the nature of his will with its capacity for choice. 'Reason also is choice', says Milton in *Paradise Lost*, III. 'Thou shalt have the power to degenerate into the lowest forms of life, the animal ; thou shalt have the power, out of thy soul's judgment, to be reborn into the higher forms of life, which are divine', and this according to the words of Pico della Mirandola, had been God's gift to man.

This capacity of man to debase himself below human level and sink to that of the beasts haunts Shakespeare throughout *King Lear*. Hamlet, distraught with agony, finds even in the claims of natural feeling no sure guide, because things-in-themselves are associated with evil :

Fie on't ! ah, fie ! 'Tis an unweeded garden  
That grows to seed : things rank and gross in nature  
Possess it merely.....  
O God ! a beast, that wants discourse of reason  
Would have mourn'd longer.

*Hamlet*, I. 2. 135.

It is the violation of reason and the principle of order in Nature that we have hitherto considered. Let us now turn to the attributes of Nature as Shakespeare and his contemporaries understood them. Rosalind in her debate with Celia on the gifts of Fortune and Nature emphasizes that Nature's bounties are to be found in the 'lineaments' of the face and character, and not in the gifts of the world which Fortune bestows on man. Nature's gifts relate to body and mind : beauty, strength, nobility, and courage, but specially wisdom and virtue with which man can flout Fortune. Fortune and Nature

are two rival goddesses, a conception current in Elizabethan times, and one reaching back to antiquity. Nature, Fortune's rival, was often represented by the goddess Sapia or Virtue, who might sit on a four square pedestal, eyes open, holding the mirror of Prudence, signifying self-knowledge. Orlando endowed with natural nobility and wisdom: 'never school'd and yet learned, full of noble device', will 'chide no breather in the world' but himself 'against whom I know most faults'. The Duke Senior is not only a picture of patience, but he can 'translate the stubbornness of Fortune into so quiet and so sweet a style'. The 'icy fang' and 'churlish chiding of the winter's wind' are 'counsellors that feelingly persuade me what I am'. Such a state is easier to achieve in the greenwood (as later on the heath in *King Lear*) than in the court.

Machiavelli commenting on Fortune and Nature (Discourses, III, XXXI) says :

'a truly great man is ever the same under all circumstances ; and if his fortune varies, exalting him at one moment and oppressing him at another, he himself never varies, but always preserves a firm courage, which is so closely inter-woven with his character that everyone can readily see that fickleness of fortune has no power over him.'

There is at least one passage in *King Lear* which shows that Shakespeare was well aware of the other aspect of Nature — the wild and unchecked Nature, as an amoral and disruptive force. The opening lines in Edmund's first soliloquy are diametrically opposed to the traditional Elizabethan view of nature.

Thou, Nature, art my goddess, and to thy law  
My services are bound. Wherefore should I  
Stand in the plague of custom, and permit  
The curiosity of nations to deprive me,  
For that I am some twelve or fourteen moonshines  
Lag of a brother ?

*King Lear*, I. 2. 1-6.

This rival concept of Nature gained currency with the growth of free thought after the liberating effects of the Renaissance and the Reformation. What precisely was the source is still a matter of speculation. Possibly some of the revolutionary doctrines of Nature came from France, notably in the poems of Th'eophile and the polemics of Carassus. 'Edmund's lines prove', says R. C. Bald to whom I have earlier referred, 'that some of the doctrines of the

free thinkers, which stirred the Church and the state to action in France in 1623, were familiar enough in England just after the turn of the century'. My point is this that even earlier than that anti-traditional ideas had currency in literature though the specific sources remain as yet untraced. Marlowe, for example, is reported to have aired many heretical ideas which Richard Baines laid in a paper before the Privy Council shortly before Marlowe's death on May 30, 1593. Even Edmund's revolutionary doctrine about Nature is but an echo of *Tamburlaine* (1537): the Scythian conqueror replying to Cosroe's charges of treachery against him draws a parallel from Nature in his own defence :

Nature, that fram'd us of four elements  
 Warring within our breasts for regiment,  
 Doth teach us all to have aspiring minds :  
 Our souls, whose faculties can comprehend  
 The wondrous architecture of the world,  
 And measure every wandering planet's course,  
 Still climbing after knowledge infinite,  
 And always moving as the restless spheres,  
 Will us to wear ourselves, and never rest...

*Tamburlaine*, Part I, II, 7.

Marlowe draws upon Aristotle and Plato to deduce his own doctrine. He even cites mythology to establish his point about disruption of order by usurpation :

The thirst of reign and sweetness of a crown,  
 That caus'd the eldest son of heavenly Ops  
 To thrust his dotting father from his chair,  
 And place himself in the imperial heaven,

\* \* \*

What better precedent than mighty Jove ?

II, 7.

*Tamburlaine* is here the mouthpiece of his creator who traces the passion for sovereignty to the same ultimate source as the scientific impulse. This will to power unrestrained by morality may be traced to Machiavelli or to the Italian philosopher Bruno, whom Marlowe might have met, and to whom is generally attributed the saying that a heroic soul should follow an inward illumination unfettered by any other consideration of propriety or ethics.

Like the Marlovian hero who sets Cosroe against his brother, and allows him a brief spell of glory only to have him killed in the end, Edmund is also a Machiavel who in cold-blooded treachery pits his father against Edgar, then the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall against his father, and finally one sister against another for his advantage. But unlike Tamburlaine who is the author's spokesman in the play, we are far from being sure if Edmund's view of Nature is Shakespeare's own. On the other hand, Shakespeare seems to be inclined the other way round : there is no other play than *King Lear* in which Shakespeare has expressed so much of horror at the violation of order and some of the horror is made explicit in the character of Edmund.

The term 'art' means in Shakespeare either, artifice or skill, especially human skill applied to constructive end : Art in the latter sense is more common e.g. fine art, magic, sorcery etc. : 'Well fitted in arts, glorious in arms'. *L.L.L.* (Fine Art) ; 'Why, thy verse swells with stuff so fine and smooth / That thou art even natural in thine art'. *T. of A.* (Poetry) ; 'The fixure of her eye has motion in it / As we are mocked with art'. *W. T.* (Sculpture) ; 'More matter, with less art'. *Ham.* (Rhetoric) ; 'In sweet music is such art / Killing care and grief of heart'. *Ham.* (Music) ; 'Their malady convinces / The great essay of art'. *Mac.* (Medicine) ; 'Two spent swimmers, that do cling together / And choke their art'. *J.C.* (Swimming) ; 'The harlot's cheek, beautified with plastering art, / Is not more ugly...' *Ham.* (Cosmetics) ; 'I want that glib and oily art, / To speak and purpose not'. *Lear.* (Flattery) ; 'Was never call'd to bear my part / Or show the glory of our art'. *Mac.* (Sorcery) ; 'If by your art, my dearest father, you have / Put the wild waters in this roar'. *Tem.* (Magic) ; 'Over that art / Which you say adds to nature, is an art / That nature makes'. *W. T.* (Horticulture) ; 'Use your art of wooing, win her to consent to you'. *M. W. W.* ; 'Now art thou what thou art, by art as well as by nature'. *R. J.* (Courtship). 'The art o' the court / As hard to leave as keep. *Cym.* (Courtier's art, or sophistication) ; 'Nature is above art in that respect'. *Lear.* (Coining) etc. There are not many examples in Shakespeare of the term 'art' being used in the general sense of artifice or skill : 'This is a practice / As full of labour as a wise man's art'. *T.N.* ; here no specific art is indicated. But even that famous line in *Macbeth*

'There's no art / To find the mind's construction in the face' implies physiognomy little known as an organized branch of art in Shakespeare's time.

### III

Ever since Shakespeare's own time his art has been traditionally associated with nature<sup>2</sup>. This of course meant naturalness or ease and spontaneity. When his first editors Heminge and Condell said that Shakespeare was a 'happie imitator of Nature' they meant the natural ease with which he wrote leaving scarcely a blot in his papers. The spontaneity of Shakespeare's verse has been suggested by Milton in *L'Allegro* where he has been addressed as 'Fancy's child, warbling his native woodnotes wild'. But this association with the 'Warbler' came to signify Shakespeare's lack of learning, which gained an unfortunate notoriety in conjunction with Ben Jonson's remark about his 'small Latine and less Greeke'. Yet Ben Jonson was the first to say in his memorial poem to Shakespeare that the Goddess Nature herself was proud of Shakespeare's design. Later, in a less guarded moment, Jonson remarked that 'Shakespeare wanted Arte'. This has also been confirmed by T.S. Eliot, who remarked that *Hamlet* 'is most certainly an artistic failure'. Dr. Johnson said that Shakespeare was "above all writers, at least above all modern writers, the poet of nature". He meant that Shakespeare's plays are pictures of the variety of natural fact: they are works 'exhibiting the real state of sublunary nature, which partakes of good and evil, joy and sorrow ...'. It was Coleridge who said about Shakespeare that he always keeps on the high road of life and in the main march of human affections. Mr. Alfred Harbage adds that Shakespearian tragedy is a high road leading home, telling us what we have always known. Surely this is true: basically human nature has not altered throughout the ages.

Shakespeare's treatment of some themes which have important bearing on his plays might also suggest his preference for Nature. Such antithetical combinations as Fortune and Nature, Nature and Nurture, Virtue versus Gentility had wide currency in the Renaissance. This last, Virtue versus Gentility, is a dominant motif in Marlowe; and provides the all-important theme in *All's Well* around which the

play has been articulated. The upshot of the play's moral 'Virtue is the true nobility' has been dealt with in great detail by M. C. Bradbrook in her article in R. E. S., new Series I, 1950; and there is no point in recapitulating her arguments once again. Suffice it to say, that gentility became somewhat cheap in Shakespeare's time because the College of Heralds could easily be bribed to invent a noble pedigree for any one; and knighthood became a purchasable commodity. Sir Toby's sarcastic remark about Sir Andrew that 'He is a knight dubbed with unhatched rapier and on carpet consideration' is enough to imply the dubious way in which an idiot like Andrew acquired the distinction. And although John Shakespeare also applied for the grant of coat of arms and achieved it through the influence of his illustrious son, that did not prevent Shakespeare from having a dig at gentility through the mouth of the clown in *The Winter's Tale*: 'I was a gentleman born before my father' — his incontrovertible plea being that the prince called him 'brother' before the king did so to his father. What sounds very uncommon is Shakespeare's striking a democratic attitude, more so, because it is the king in *All's Well* who utters the lines about the common quality of human blood undermining heredity or distinction at birth:

King. 'Tis only title thou disdain'st in her, the which  
I can build up. Strange is it, that our bloods,  
Of colour, weight, and heat, poured all together  
Would quite confound distinction, yet stand off  
In differences so mighty.

*All's Well*, III. 3. 112.

In an excellent article, *Fortune and Nature in As You Like It* (Sh. Q. Vol. 6, 1955), on which I have earlier drawn for some of my points, J. Shaw shows that the basic philosophic strife forms an important pattern throughout the play, affecting both plot and character. Orlando and Duke senior are endowed with natural wisdom and nobility, while Oliver and Duke Frederick lacking Nature's gifts of wisdom and self-knowledge have forfeited Nature's 'contentment' in a perilous attempt to acquire Fortune's gifts. They resort to policy, cunning and other indirect methods, a sample of which Oliver reveals to Charles while slandering Orlando: 'he will practise against thee by poison, entrap thee by some treacherous device and never leave thee till he hath ta'en thy life by some indirect means or other'. That Shakespeare was out to depreciate the

men of fortune becomes obvious from his omission of certain motives in the treacherous actions of Oliver and Duke Frederick, which he found in Lodge. For example, Oliver confesses that his 'soul hates nothing more than Orlando' and adds 'yet I know not why'. His counterpart in Lodge has sufficient motivation for his cruel treatment to his brother because he has been cheated out of most of his patrimony as the eldest son. Similarly the tyrannical Frederick gives no reason why he banishes Rosalind: 'Let it suffice thee I like thee not'. Lodge's wicked king has had his reasons for dismissing his daughter's companion lest one of the courtiers might marry her and lay his claim to the kingdom.

The theme of Nature and Nurture<sup>a</sup> is more significant than the two themes we have discussed and is almost as pervasive as Art and Nature. We have the first suggestion of the theme in Oliver's description of the natural nobility of Orlando: 'he is gentle, never schooled and yet learned, full of noble device, of all sorts enchantingly beloved'. But Shakespeare does not pursue the theme till he comes to the last three romances: *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*. Impressed by the nobility of Guiderius and Arviragus, which seemed out of place in the sylvan surrounding, Imogen made some comments which may serve as general enunciation of the theme:

Gods, what lies  
I have heard!  
Our courtiers say all's savage but at court,  
Experience, O, thou disprov'st report!  
The emperious seas breed monsters; for the dish  
Poor tributary rivers as sweet fish.

*Cymbeline*, IV. 2, 32-6.

Evidently Imogen has Cloten in mind, the monstrous product of the 'art o' the court', whose bestial lust pursues her in the forest. Early in the play, even in the first scene, the distinction between two men, Cloten and Posthumus, brought up in the same court has been noticed by the First Gentleman:

He that hath miss'd the princess is a thing  
Too bad for bad report: and he that hath her  
(I mean, that married her, alack good man  
And therefore banish'd) is a creature such

As, to seek through the regions of the earth  
 For one his like ; there would be something failing  
 In him that should compare. I do not think  
 So fair an outward, and such stuff within  
 Endows a man, but he.

*Cymbeline*, I. 1. 16-24.

The 'envious' court is no proper habitat for good men, who, like the Senior Duke, Orlando, Rosalind, Belarius, and Kent are banished for their goodness. One remembers the clown's muddled query to Autolycus 'For which of your virtues have you been whipp'd out of the court?' It is also significant that really good men in Shakespeare are seldom fortunate ; and we have a long line of unfortunate people : Cordelia, Perdita, Edgar, Guiderius, Arviragus, Posthumus etc. And Touchstone's objection to being addressed as 'fool' till Fortune has bestowed her gifts on him has its pertinence not only in the play but also in the broader scheme of Shakespearian ethics : Fortune's 'gifts are mightily misplaced'.

Now to return to Posthumus : his subsequent conduct as when he asks his servant to kill his wife or decides to fight against his own country is out of character. If he falls off from his high ideal it is because of the devilish machinations of Iachimo, who holds in thrall a naturally good and unsuspecting mind unaccustomed to the world's crooked ways. It is a tragic theme treated in *Othello* : mysterious and inscrutable. Why did Posthumus, as a matter for that *Othello*, fall in with a villain ? Is it not Fate or Fortune ?

When Nature hath made a fair creature, may she not by fortune fall into fire ?...Indeed there is Fortune too hard for Nature.

*As You Like It*, I. 2. 38.

But the tragi-comedic pattern of *Cymbeline* required it that Posthumus should be reclaimed, virtue rewarded, vice punished and even the devilish Iachimo made to repent for his vices. Indeed there is Art too hard for Nature !

Pitted against courtly nurture are the two brothers, Guiderius and Arviragus, brought up under the influence of nature which was 'both law and impulse' to them. They represent the triumph of Nature untutored by Art. 'They are worthy', says Belarius, 'To inlay heaven with stars'.



O thou goddess  
 Thou divine Nature : thou thyself blazon'st  
 As Zephyrs blowing below the violet,  
 Not wagging his sweet head ; and yet, as rough  
 (Their royal blood enchaf'd) as the rud'st wind  
 That by the top doth take the mountain pine  
 And make him stoop to th' vale. 'Tis wonder  
 That an invisible instinct should frame them  
 To royalty unlearn'd, honour untaught,  
 Civility not seen from other, valour  
 That wildly grows in them, but yields a crop  
 As if it had been sow'd.

*Cymbeline*, IV. 2. 169-181.

One is reminded of another and the loveliest product of Nature : Perdita, who is nurtured by a shepherd but has not a shepherd's nature. Unlike Rosalind, who is an intruder in Arden, she has grown up in sylvan surroundings like 'Flora in April's front'. When she dances, her lover is put in mind of the waves of the sea 'move still, still so'. All her actions are so natural and yet so singular in each particular that all her 'acts are queens'.

Nothing she does or seems  
 But smacks of something greater than herself ;  
 Too noble for this place.

*The Winter's Tale*, IV. 4. 157-9.

She speaks in a verse of buoyant freshness, but tinged with a delicate sense of incompleteness, which is a marked contrast to the brutal frankness of the shepherd. Even when deeply in love she is too delicate and reticent for direct expression, and finds utterance through the silent symbolism of flowers : prim-roses that die unmarried, violets sweeter than Cytherea's breath, and those that Proserpina let fall at the clasp of her awful lover. Yet she has a natural dignity that would not stomach an insult even from a king. When the old shepherd, that 'weather-bitten conduit of many kings' reign' is struck dumb with fear, it is Perdita who mutters :

I was about to speak and tell him plainly,  
 The selfsame sun that shines upon his court,  
 Hides not his visage from our cottage, but  
 Looks on alike.

*The Winter's Tale*, IV. 4. 441-4.

'For Shakespeare these shepherds then', says a critic<sup>4</sup>, 'may serve as exemplar of virtue if they are Royal shepherds, and Nature may without the civilizing influence of Art if it is Royal Nature'. What actually the critic means by Royal Nature is not clear ; if he means essentially noble nature it is all right, but in case he relates nature to royalty, I have my objections. There are many examples of noble nature in Shakespeare, not even remotely connected with royalty : Orlando, Posthumus, Gonzalo can claim no royal descent, and Helena, in particular, is a 'poor physician's daughter', who is despised by the vile snob Bertram on no other ground than that she was born of low parents. In Nature there is no snobbery neither in Shakespeare.

'Indeed, there is Fortune too hard for Nature, when Fortune makes Nature's natural the cutter-off of Nature's wit', so says Rosalind at the entrance of the fool. Just as there is 'Nature's natural', so there is the brute among men. Caliban is the perfect example of the brute, who would be petted, patted, given food and drink, taught to talk and told stories ; and yet he would turn vindictive when hindered. When Caliban complains that he has been tied in the hard rock, Prospero reminds him how he lodged him in his own cell until he sought to violate his master's daughter. Then comes the beast's exhilaration at the prospect of peopling 'this isle with Calibans', which he has missed :

Oho, Oho ! would't had been done !

Such a base nature defies nurture. Even the best teacher in the world could bring about no change in Caliban, who will not take 'any print of goodness', 'being capable of all ill'. The metaphor of printing is highly suggestive : too coarse a base cannot receive any impression,, which requires a certain minimum of smoothness.

A devil, a born devil, on whose nature  
Nurture can never stick.

Nothing better shows the limitation of Prospero's omnipotent art than his failure to reform the brute nature of Caliban. Even Miranda, perfect specimen of noble nature, 'tutored by art', defies her father when in her ardour to meet her lover she steals out of her father's cell. And 'this first dawn of disobedience' comes so

naturally, says Coleridge, 'as to seem the working of the scriptural command': 'Thou shalt leave father and mother'. Victory of Nature over Art indeed!

#### IV

All these might only suggest Shakespeare's preferences. There is nothing absolute in Shakespeare, nothing sacrosanct. We may utilize Keats's happily phrased insight into Shakespeare's 'negative capability', and place the whole secret in Shakespeare's power to identify himself imaginatively with all sorts and conditions. Here, for one thing, all the Arcadians return to the court. The two princes in *Cymbeline* show an awareness that the court may in many respects be superior to the caves. Orlando in self-defence against his roughness to the Duke claims that he is 'inland bred', and knows 'some nurture'; Rosalind attributes her perfect accent to her 'inland bred' uncle; and even the greatest Arcadian idealist, the Senior Duke, reassures Orlando of courteous reception at the dinner-table; for, he has seen 'better days' and has 'with holymen' been 'knoll'd to the church' and sat at 'good men's feasts', shed tears of pity for the distressed. And to these avocations of civilized life he returns with his brother exiles, with whom he would 'share the good of our returned fortune'. In fact, Fortune played no small part in the restoration of order in the state and also in the general reconciliation: the lionness, the snake, and later, the hermit were largely responsible for reforming the wicked brothers.

Coming now to the question of restoration of order, which in the comedies is usually effected through marriage, *Love's Labour's Lost* may be called an exceptional play which does not end in marriage. It is also the only play in which the opposition between Art and Nature is projected at the sociological level.<sup>5</sup> Even in *As You Like It* where there are two distinct segments of life, Arcadian and courtly, the theme is discussed at the philosophical level by Touchstone and Corin, 'the natural philosopher', who has been endowed with a point of view.

*Love's Labour's Lost* is a court comedy where the sovereign himself is the symbol of order; and marriage after all is not the destination of courtly love, nor was it a safe proposition in Elizabeth's

court. Coleridge has found in the play an image of the court-centred Elizabethan culture with linguistic acrobatics particularly punning as one of its indispensable ingredients ; and in Berowne, along with Mercutio and Benedick, a typical Elizabethan gentleman, extremely polite and intellectually highly gifted. In this most artificial of Shakespeare's plays, which, as Granville-Barker says, is to be enjoyed as one enjoys music or dance, it is Berowne who stands for nature, though caught in the toils of artifice. At the king of Navarre's proposal to war against affection for the sake of learning, Berowne says that he would rather study where he will 'dine' and where to find a 'mistress fine'. Nonetheless he signs the article still maintaining that it is a sport contrary to nature. No wonder that this defender of 'the right Promethean fire' is the first to break the vow of celibacy.

From women's eyes this doctrine I derive :  
They sparkle still the right Promethean fire ;  
They are the books, the arts, the academes,  
That show, contain and nourish all the world.

*Love's Labour's Lost*, IV. 3. 344-7.

One is reminded of the court at Urbino in Castiglione, presided over by ladies, who were at once an inspiration and mainstay of courtliness. Shakespeare's courtiers however woo the French ladies wearing masks and repeating some conned phrases : 'taffeta phrases, silken terms precise' ; and the ladies do not take them seriously at all ; return 'sport for sport'. And the whole thing falls through like a 'Christmas comedy'.

Evidently, art or artifice defeats nature. And even Berowne whom Shakespeare has set against all others—one man's good sense against crowding affectations—has to pay the price for his overspruceness, and all that he gets from his ladylove, Rosaline, is an appreciation of his wit :

His eye begets occasion for his wit,  
For every object that the one doth catch,  
The other turns to a moving jest,  
Which his fair tongue, conceit's expositor  
Delivers in such apt and gracious words  
That aged ears play truant at his tales,  
And younger hearings are quite ravished :  
So sweet and voluble is his discourse.

*Love's Labour's Lost*, II. 1. 69-76.

We do not know how much of the courtier's art or courtliness was a reality in Elizabeth's court. Was Shakespeare caricaturing himself : his sweet, honied mode, his sonneteering ? Walter Pater sees in Berowne 'a reflex of Shakespeare himself' and there is in all that Berowne utters 'a delicate raillery of Shakespeare himself at his chosen manner... . That gloss of dainty language is a second nature to him ; and even at his best he is not without a certain artifice'. John Palmer<sup>6</sup> remarks that language is but one aspect of the matter : 'Berowne is the first of Shakespeare's characters in which the essential of his comic genius becomes apparent', and Palmer describes it to be 'a combination of detachment with sympathy'. We may only add that Rosaline is the first among the dark ladies in Shakespeare ; and the reference to her black eyes : 'Two pitch-balls struck in her face for eyes' and her questionable morals : 'One that will do the deed/Though Argus were her eunuch and her guard' puts one in mind of the Dark Lady of the sonnets.

When all is said, the question remains : Can a protean artist like Shakespeare be identified with one of his creations ? If however Art is to be identified with Nature at all, here it is in Berowne ; call him Shakespeare or not.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. "Thou, Nature, Art my Goddess": 'Edmund and Renaissance Free-Thought': *Joseph Quincy Adams Memorial Studies*, ed. by James G. Mcmanaway & others,  
Washington, 1948, Pp. 337-349.
2. Some of the references I have derived from Geoffrey Bush : *Shakespeare and The Natural Condition*, Harvard University Press,  
Cambridge, 1956. Pp. 8-9.
3. The theme has been discussed by Frank Kermode in the Introduction of the Arden edition of *The Tempest*, and also by J. Middleton Murry in his *Shakespeare*.

Murry says that 'in *The Winter's Tale* we have first Shakespeare's casual, in *The Tempest* his deliberate reply to the scepticism of Montaigne. ...And thus it is that Shakespeare, in Gonzalo's words, with splendid irony changes Montaigne's report of the

Indians, from mere nature, to a picture of nature's art in man, working on man. He discards the savagery, and retains only what belongs to the ideal and human. It is the innocence not of the primitive, but of the ultimate, which he seeks to embody. ...Caliban is the primitive; but Miranda and Ferdinand are the ultimate. ...Nature and Nurture alone can make human Nature. But the nurture that is Nature's own is hard to find'. Pp. 401-2.

4. Edward William Tayler : *Nature and Art in Renaissance Literature*. London, 1964, p. 133. I owe some of my informations to this book.
5. This point I derived from Madeline Doran : *Endeavors of Art*. The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1964.
6. John Palmer : *Comic characters of Shakespeare*,  
Macmillan & Co. Ltd., London, 1956, p. 25.

## ANOUILH'S "ANTIGONE" : A REASSESSMENT

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KRISHNA SEN

In his handling of classical sources in plays as varied as 'Eurydice' (1941), 'Antigone' (1942), 'Medea' (1946), and the two Orestes plays (1942 and 1972), Anouilh is generally regarded as being less concerned with the communication of a vision of the human condition through the use of ancient analogues than with the exploitation of the technical possibilities inherent in presenting an established (and in that sense, predetermined) action.<sup>1</sup> The present day writer who reworks ancient myth in modern terms may certainly alter values and motivations to suit the times ; he may, in addition, attempt to gain dramatic effect by counterpointing the different levels of the action — the past set over against the present most notably, and also the heroic against the mundane, the ideal against the sordid, the illusory against the real. As a matter of convention, however, he may not tamper with the broad outlines of the stories. Antigone must die, and though the modern Creon may try to save her (unlike the Creon of Sophocles' play), he must ultimately fail : Orpheus must bring Eurydice back from the underworld only to lose her again : Medea must kill her children after being abandoned by Jason : Orestes must avenge his slaughtered father. In other words, while the presence of the classical analogue as the basis of a contemporary play opens up intricate possibilities for comparison and contrast between the two worlds, it also acts as a sort of a limiting factor, controlling the shape of the action.

Anouilh makes capital out of this necessity to abide by the given facts through a calculated theatrical tactic — he makes his "dramatis personae" aware of the preordained parts they are destined to play, in the drama which is about to unfold. Several interesting consequences result from this play. There is, first, an ingenious and ironic duality of effect, since the characters function, as it were, both within and outside their appointed rôles ; the dramatic impact stems

from their irrevocable progress towards the tragic conclusion while being conscious of their every step. Then again, since all the moves in any well-known story are already determined and the outcome a foregone conclusion, the motivations of the characters can hardly count for much if, as part of Anouilh's dramatic convention, every assertion of free will on their part is known in advance to be foredoomed. With the possibility neither of meaningful choice nor of significant decision, the moral distinction between good and evil tends to become blurred — an effect heightened by the fact that Anouilh's plays present in the main a godless universe (in a fairly large opus, only in *Roméo et Jeannette* is there a mention of "the one upstairs"). As the Chorus of *Antigone* puts it — "There is a sort of fellow-feeling among characters in a tragedy: he who kills is as innocent as he who gets killed: it's all a matter of what part you are playing". In Anouilh's hands, myth relinquishes its metaphysical parameters, so to speak, and becomes a stylized game. Anouilh plays both with his subject matter and with his audience, hinting at altered conclusions which do not finally materialise. The deliberate disruption of the dramatic illusion that results from his use of anachronisms (Orpheus and Eurydice eloping to a seedy hotel in Marseilles, for instance, or Polynices "in his evening clothes ... smoking cigarettes"), and of choric figures who intrude upon the performance to comment on it, heightens the impression of artifice. The paradox is that for Anouilh not free will but artifice (in the sense of a cosmic game of chess in which human beings are only pawns) is the wellspring of tragedy. — "When your name is Antigone there is only one part you can play; and she will have to play hers through to the end".<sup>4</sup>

The notion of drama as a game in which the dramatist openly manipulates his "marionettes" instead of submitting himself to some rigorous internal logic of character and action is, indeed, central to Anouilh's concept of dramatic form — to what he called "theatricalism".<sup>5</sup> While two early pieces, *'L' Hermine* (1931) and *'Jézabel* (1932), were well-made plays in the tradition of Scribe and Sardou, with *'Le bal des voleurs* and *'Le voyageur sans bagage* (1932 and 1936) Anouilh is already launched on his adroitly organised games of make-believe — illustrating his conviction that "theatre is above all a free game of the intellect" and that "verisimilitude, a carefully



directed plot, skillfully regulated entrances and exits, are nothing".<sup>4</sup> In 'Propos déplorables', he explains his attitude to the writing of plays — " ... il faut pouvoir jouer d'une façon ou d'une autre avec un sujet au lieu de le subir."<sup>5</sup> ("One must be able to play with a topic in some way or other instead of subduing it.") Drama, is a game or "jeu", with the pun on the verb "jouer" which means both "to play a game" and "to act or play a rôle". The kind of artistic freedom (which, by naturalistic standards, might be termed irresponsibility) that this approach permits may be illustrated from Anouilh's programme note to the 1961 London production of 'Becket'. There he says that only after finishing the play did he discover that Becket was not a Saxon but a Norman. However, since the spectacle of a Saxon Becket defying in the figure of Henry an alien Norman overlord made good theatre, he decided that accuracy in every detail need not be his first concern — "J'ai fait le roi dont j'avais besoin et le Becket ambigu dont j'avais besoin ... J'ai décidé que cela m'était égal." ("I created the kind of king I required and the kind of ambiguous Becket I required ... I decided that it was all the same to me").<sup>6</sup>

The basic tenets of "theatricalism" — that is, of treating the stage as a stage instead of as a self-contained autonomous world — Anouilh probably derived as much from his acknowledged childhood fascination with vaudeville as from his later association with innovative theatre directors like Copeau, Juvet, Pitoëff and Dullin. Then there was his "Master" Giraudoux,<sup>7</sup> who in 'La guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu' (the irony is quite lost in the accepted English title 'Tiger at the Gates') anticipated Anouilh in showing the equivocal nature of moral categories such as choice and responsibility when acting within the confines of a predetermined event — however desperately Hector tries to avoid it, the Trojan War, as an incontrovertible historical fact, undoubtedly will take place. There was also the influence of Pirandello. In the preface to 'Six Characters in search of an Author', Pirandello had written —

"There is no logical development, no concatenation of the events. Very true. ... But I had precisely to *present* this organic and natural chaos. And to present a chaos is not at all to present chaotically. ... That my presentation is the reverse of confused is proved by ... the way in which, for those with more searching vision, the unusual values enclosed within it come out."

Obviously referring to these ideas, Anouilh commented—

"... some of my colleagues, masters or workmates, from Giraudoux to Achard to Salacrou ... have been fighting to kill the notion of the "well made play"...Pirandello, in a stroke of genius, the importance of which can never be exaggerated, took the trouble one day of completely asphyxiating the notion with his 'Six Characters in Search of an Author'..."<sup>8</sup>

Like Pirandello, too, Anouilh claims for artifice a higher truth than that which can be achieved through naturalistic representation. Referring to the controversial ( and flagrantly manipulated ) dénouement of 'Le voyageur sans bagage', Anouilh wrote —

"A drama that has this toying resembles a musical composition. The toying won't make the drama less true....On the contrary, the drama seems to draw even closer to truth as the author toys more and better with it."<sup>9</sup>

That Anouilh remained consistent about this conviction is evident from statements made almost twenty years later in defence of his 'La valse des toréadors' (1951), as also from the words of one of his characters, Count "Tigre", in 'La répétition' ( 1950 )—"Life is very pretty but it has no form. The object of art is precisely to give it one, and through all possible artifices to create something that is truer than truth."

The implications of Anouilh's treatment of the Greek fables surely becomes clearer in terms of this view of drama as a "jeu" or play-acting which is somehow "truer than truth". Here is something more than a modish attempt to demystify myth. On the contrary, in the spectacle of potentially heroic figures caught up in a game not of their own choosing, moving inexorably towards a crisis which they would avoid if they could, making superb gestures which they know to be meaningless, the morally coherent world of the ancient myths becomes ambiguous, self-contradictory, almost tragically absurd.

This is not to suggest that Anouilh is an Absurd playwright. Though he is keenly aware of the devaluation of ethical norms in modern times, his work displays neither the nihilism nor its formal concomitant, the systematic dysfunction of sequential logic, that we have come to expect from the Theatre of the Absurd. His Antigones still profess their ideals of purity and perfection and make their

noble sacrifices. The absurdity lies in the inflated gesture within the deflated context.

However, though Anouilh is not an exponent of Absurd theatre proper, his sympathy with the basic ethos of Absurd theatre is a matter of record. He described the first performance of 'Waiting for Godot' as equal in importance to the first performance of Pirandello's 'Six Characters...'. Even more revealing are his comments on Ionesco's 'The Chairs'. Hailing the play as a masterpiece, he wrote—

"I believe this to be better than Strindberg, because it has its 'black' humour, à la Molière, in a manner that is at times terribly funny, because it is horrifying and laughable, poignant and always true, and because—with the exception of a bit of rather old-fashioned avant-garde at the end that I do not like—it is classical."<sup>10</sup>

The meaning of the rather unexpected connections set up between black humour, Molière and the concept of the "classical" can be explained with reference to Anouilh's acclamatory essay, "Présence de Molière".<sup>11</sup> In this essay Anouilh says that Molière's comedy projects a darker vision of life than any tragedy since it views the human condition as essentially illogical and absurd. Molière is classical because his plays give us a true picture of the anguish of being human. Greek tragedy, in comparison, is restful and soothing despite situations which evoke horror : this is because it portrays man's grand ( though doomed ) postures of defiance against the Gods, and displays a destiny working ineluctably towards pre-ordained ends like a well-oiled machine. Possibly for these reasons, the Chorus of 'Tu étais si gentil quand tu étais petit' (1972) describes tragedy as an aesthetic experience having a calming effect on the spectator. One of the choric speeches in 'Antigone' contrasts tragedy with melodrama, the distinctive feature of the latter being lack of inevitability — "...sudden revelations and eleventh-hour repentances. Death in a melodrama is really horrible because it is never inevitable. The dear old father might so easily have been saved." The lack of logic in what Anouilh calls melodrama (which was for him a preferred mode ) is fairly close to the illogical universe of Absurd theatre. In the light of these observations, that Anouilh should attempt to recast the (for him) illusory world-view of ancient tragedy and inform his adaptations with the black humour he so admired in Molière and Ionesco, is perhaps not so untenable a suggestion. In

fact, Anouilh has claimed that, to appreciate his plays, audiences need to be alert and reorient their normal expectations. In his play *'La Grotte'*, the character of the "Author", who appears to be a 'persona' of the play-wright, remarks only half-jokingly that critics and audiences also require to be rehearsed – "J'ai toujours pensé, pour ma part, qu'il faudrait aussi faire répéter les spectateurs et les critiques." ("I have always thought, for my part, that it is also necessary to rehearse the spectators and the critics.")

Such a reorientation of conventional attitudes to tragedy, nobility and heroism appears to be essential with respect to *'Antigone'*. *'Antigone'* is the only one of Anouilh's plays which bears the subtitle "A Tragedy". It is also the one play of Anouilh's which is widely accepted as having a "message", as making some kind of positive commitment to noble values through Antigone's embracing martyrdom for an ideal.<sup>12</sup> It is easy to understand why, when *'Antigone'* was first performed in Paris in 1944, the ambiguities inherent in the play should have received less attention than its topicality. Antigone, a strong-willed Romantic idealist was readily identified with the Resistance, while the pragmatic Creon was cast in contemporary terms as a collaborator. However, the fact that the play was, even at that time, interpreted both as a celebration of the Resistance and also as an attack on the futility of all opposition to the German occupation, is clear enough indication that it is something more than simplistic political allegory. Anouilh himself cast doubts on such a reading – "When people ask me whose side I was on, Antigone's or Creon's, I can't reply. To write a scene convincingly you must be on both sides."<sup>13</sup> The play certainly establishes a fine balance between the emotional sympathy we feel for Antigone in her refusal to obey Creon, and the intellectual assent we give to Creon's defence of the existing order of things. Camus viewed the confrontation as quintessentially Hegelian – "...Antigone a raison, mais Creon n'a pas tort". ("Antigone is right, but Creon is not wrong.") That the matter is more complicated is, however, apparent in the interpretation offered by one of Anouilh's most perceptive critics, an interpretation diametrically opposed to that of Camus – "...ce ne sont pas deux affirmations qui s'affrontent, mais deux négations," ("...These are not two sets of affirmations which confront each other, but two sets of negations.")<sup>14</sup> Any approach to the play in terms of a

dichotomy (whether of positives or negatives) is undoubtedly closer to the argument of the play as it stands than the kind of oversimplified reading that sees Antigone triumphant in death as opposed to a disillusioned and beaten survivor in Creon. Yet even those commentators who emphasise duality have not hesitated to accept the popular version of the play as the "piece-témoin" of all freedom-loving people against coercion and political manipulation. A close look at the text of the play, however, reveals the presence of ambiguities and tensions that both challenge and deepen the impression that the play produces in performance—that of a brisk forward movement from crisis of conscience to a satisfactory resolution of the crisis. The analysis might also help us to understand the importance in the play of the anachronisms, the homely naturalistic details and the farcical elements which many critics have been unable to reconcile either with their notion of tragedy or with the grandeur of the Sophoclean original.<sup>15</sup>

## II

Anouilh's 'Antigone' follows the 'Antigone' of Sophocles fairly closely in the sequence of events. Where Anouilh differs sharply is in his eliminating all ethical content from the action as presented by Sophocles. Sophocles' play affirms a well-defined moral order with the emphasis on moderation, piety and the justice of the gods. The classical Antigone is motivated by strong religious considerations which ratify the social act of ritual burial: she tells Creon— "...nor deemed I that thy decrees were of such force that a mortal could override the unwritten and unfailing statutes of heaven." Her death is as much a validation of the moral order as Creon's recantation, for though her position obviously carried implicit divine sanction, she maintains it with the same kind of daring self-sufficiency which is displayed Creon and which is unbecoming in a mortal. That Anouilh asserts nothing so positive is evident from the one major change which he makes to the established plot. His Creon actually tries to save Antigone and almost persuades her to abandon her resolve to bury Polynices; then, in an unexpected coup-de-theatre, the wily politician makes a tactical error which drives Antigone back to her former intransigent posture so that, quite against his will, he

is forced to pronounce the sentence of her death. With one stroke, the rationale of Sophocles' play is reversed. Obviously neither Antigone nor Creon stand for absolute principles, whether of divine authority or of royal authority, since, at one point at least, both were on the verge of compromise. The equivocal nature of these attitudes needs to be examined.

Anouilh's Creon is a master of the politically expedient. In this he contrasts strongly with the wilfulness and pride of Sophocles' Creon — "...whomsoever the city may appoint, that man must be obeyed, in little things and great, in just things and unjust." The modern Creon takes his stand regarding the burial of Polynices, not from any kind of "hubris", but purely from considerations of practical politics— "...if the featherheaded rabble I govern are to understand what's what, that stench has got to fill the town for a month." This is in spite of the fact that, as an individual, he finds the whole business offensive. He tells Antigone—"Don't think that I am not just as offended as you are by the thought of that meat rotting in the sun ...It's vile ; and I can tell you what I wouldn't tell anybody else : it's stupid, monstrously stupid. But the people of Thebes have got to have their noses rubbed into it a little longer." His sudden decision to try to save Antigone is due, neither to magnanimity nor to a change of heart, but rather, to an acknowledgment of the strategic imperatives of the moment. Antigone is betrothed to his son Haemon, and her execution might cause disaffection in the family : besides, to make a martyr of Oedipus' daughter would only provide his political opponents with a figurehead round whom to rally their cause. To turn events to his own advantage, Creon is even willing to execute three innocent guards on false charges in place of Antigone : this way, prestige and authority can be maintained while avoiding the politically volatile act of sentencing Antigone. Creon is proud of the political agility which alone, in his opinion, can steer the ship of state—and the moral implications of his attitudes do not concern him at all.

Antigone, for her part, is an uncompromising idealist, relentless in her quest for perfection. Unlike Creon, she refuses absolutely to comply with modes of conduct which would be personally advantageous, but at the cost of integrity—"I want everything of life, I do ; and I want it now ! I want it total, complete : otherwise I reject it !

I will *not* be moderate." Since life can offer at best only the hope of such perfection—"hope, your whore" as she flings contemptuously at Creon—Antigone says "No" to life. By her reckoning this liberates her from all restrictions and commitments and makes her a free being—"I can say no to anything I think vile, and I don't have to count the cost ... My nails are broken, my fingers are bleeding, my arms are covered with the welts left by the paws of your guards—but I am a queen!"

The opposing world-views of Antigone and Creon come into collision in a long central scene of debate just after Antigone has been dragged into Creon's presence by guards who have caught her secretly attempting to bury Polynices' body in contravention of Creon's royal decree. As in the Hell scene in Shaw's 'Man and Superman', the dynamic ebb and flow of the argument gradually push the two contestants beyond the initial situation (the implications of flouting a royal edict) to an examination of their motives and personal convictions. Antigone is the archetypal rebel—"We are of the tribe that asks questions, and we ask them to the bitter end. Until no tiniest chance of hope remains to be strangled by our hands." But we soon become aware of the ambiguous psychology underlying her passionate refusal to compromise. To begin with, Antigone claims that she was driven by affection ("Polynices has earned his rest...He was my brother.") and by religious necessity ("Those who are not buried wander eternally and find no rest. ...I owe it to him to unlock the house of the dead."). But it does not take long for Creon to convince her of the hollowness of ritual burial practices, "the wretched consolation of that mass-production jibber-jabber"; and indeed, when pressed, Antigone too admits that she is sceptical of ritual—"Yes, 'I've thought of all that. ...Yes, it's absurd." She is also somewhat shocked by Creon's disclosure that Polynices had been no better than a "cruel vicious little voluptuary" who had once struck his old father Oedipus for refusing to settle his gaming debts. What really undermines her determination, however, is the revelation that the body she buried might well not be that of Polynices at all. Eteocles and Polynices had slaughtered each other, says Creon, and "The Argive cavalry had trampled them down. They were smashed to a pulp." But since, for reasons of state, it was necessary to make a hero of the patriotic brother and

an example of the treacherous one, "I had the prettier of the two carcasses brought in, and gave it a State funeral ; and I left the other to rot. I don't know which was which." The patent absurdity of throwing away her life for an unidentifiable body causes Antigone to accept defeat and to withdraw, in what constitutes part of the pivotal moment of the play—

ANTIGONE (in a mild voice): Why do you tell me all this ?

CREON: Would it have been better to let you die a victim to that obscene story ?

ANTIGONE: It might have been. I had my faith.

CREON: What are you going to do now ?

ANTIGONE (rises to her feet in a daze): I shall go up to my room.

CREON: Don't stay alone. Go and find Haemon. And get married quickly.

ANTIGONE (in a whisper): Yes.

Creon is, of course, motivated by pragmatic concerns in which ideals play no part. As he has said to Antigone earlier — "I want you to fatten up a bit so that you can give him [ Haemon ] a sturdy boy. Let me assure you that Thebes needs that boy a good deal more than it needs your death". But surprisingly enough, at the moment of Antigone's capitulation, the normally astute Creon makes a crucial mistake and presses his advantage too hard. He tries to impress upon Antigone his own philosophy of life, that of making concessions and adapting to situations since "life is nothing more than the happiness you get out of it." It is the wrong move because the one thing that had provoked Antigone's contempt all along, and of which Creon was well aware, was compromise, saying "yes" to life. Creon's words now suggest to her that happiness involves compromise ; she refuses to "go on growling and defending the bone you call happiness", a "humdrum happiness — provided a person doesn't ask too much of life". She reneges on her momentary compliance and literally compels Creon to call in the guards to take her away.

Yet, the fact that Antigone had come so close to compromise (as her Sophoclean original never does ) surely suggests the presence of something fundamentally weak at the heart of her passionate idealism. Anouilh appears to apply a modern psychoanalytical



approach to the classical heroine when his Creon charges Antigone with being a sado-masochist like her father — "The pride of Oedipus! ...I can see your father in you ... For him as for you human happiness was meaningless ; and mere human misery was not enough to satisfy his passion for torment"; with being prone to self-dramatisation — "You have cast me for the villain in this little play of yours, and yourself for the heroine"; and with harbouring a morbid death-wish — "Nothing less than a cosy tea party with death and destiny will quench your thirst". When Antigone says "... what a person can do, a person ought to do", she seems to be the embodiment of courage and integrity ; yet it is disturbing to find that for her the real choice is between death on the one hand, and a regressive and childlike fantasy of a perfect world on the other — "I want to be sure of everything this very day ; sure that everything will be as beautiful as when I was a little girl. If not, I want to die". Idealism, heroism, self-sacrifice, resistance unto death — all the qualities which for many constitute the core of Anouilh's play — reveal themselves on analysis to be forms of withdrawal from life or refusal to engage with the gritty problems of living, and therefore ultimately unreasonable and negative. As Creon shrewdly observes — "Death was her purpose, whether she knew it or not. Polynices was a mere pretext. When she had to give up that pretext she found another one — that life and happiness were tawdry things, and not worth possessing. She was bent upon only one thing : to reject life and to die." It is not Antigone's sincerity which is in doubt but her whole philosophy.

By contrast, the solidity and sensuousness of the imagery through which Creon evokes the essence of living make his attitudes seem not only more sensible but more positive and substantial — "Life is a child playing round your feet, a tool you hold firmly in your grip, a bench you sit down upon in the evening in your garden." The Chorus tells us that "he practices the difficult art of a leader of men", and Creon himself explains to Antigone — "I stand here with both feet firm on the ground ; with both hands in my pocket ; and I have decided that so long as I am king — being less ambitious than your father was — I shall merelly devote myself to introducing a little order into this absurd kingdom ; if that is possible. ... Kings, my gril, have other things to do than to surrender themselves to

their private feelings." And when at the end, after losing everything he holds most dear, Creon stoically proceeds to a Cabinet meeting because "the work is there to be done, and a man can't fold his arms and refuse to do it", he certainly displays heroism of a sort. To simply reverse the focus of the play from Antigone to Creon, however, would be to misread it, for like Antigone, Creon too begs a cardinal question — surrender to life may be reasonable, but ought it to be unconditional? He tries to convince Antigone of the futility and unnaturalness of saying "no" to life — "It is easy to say no. To say yes, you have to sweat and roll up your sleeves and plunge both hands into life up to the elbows. ... No is one of your man-made words. Can you imagine a world in which trees say no to the sap? In which beasts say no to hunger and to propagation?" But Antigone is quick to detect the fundamental error in Creon's argument — animals and trees do not have the human freedom to choose. "Animals, eh, Creon! What a king you could be if only men were animals"? The play appears to be caught in a deadlock. To submit to the conditions imposed by life is to deny the autonomy of the human will. To assert the will is to deny life. Neither alternative is definitive enough to weight the balance for its acceptance.

The way out of this impasse surely lies in taking into account those very factors which have distressed critics who read Anouilh's play along Sophoclean lines — the anachronisms, the low comedy of the Guards and all that they imply. In the older play the dramatic interest had been divided solely between Antigone and Créon. The binary opposition between the law of the gods and the law of men had been capable of subsuming major moral concerns of the ancient Greeks with respect to the operations of 'dike' over 'adikia'. In the desacralized world of today which Anouilh portrays in his plays, the options are more complex, because the equation has changed. That the problem of individual integrity is applicable to all times and places is evident from Anouilh's placing this ancient mythological story within a contemporary context where the heroine has coffee and croissants for breakfast. As opposed to Sophocles, however, the modern dramatist is quite unable to draw absolute distinctions between the morally right and the morally wrong since religious sanctions have lost their hold over the minds of men. In a world

without firm ethical guidelines, the individual conscience, for better or worse, has to work out its own mode of salvation. Thus in Anouilh's play, Sophocles' majestic distinction between divine and human prerogatives has been widened out to include various purely human forms of commitment and lack of commitment.

In the figure of Anouilh's Antigone we see that heroism and idealism, when divorced from the faith in a divinely ordered universe which gave meaning to the classical Antigone's sacrifice, can become personal and idiosyncratic gestures, lacking in deeper social significance. It is interesting that at one point the modern heroine admits that her defiance is "For nobody. For myself." ; in this sense her death is virtually suicide. Indeed, Haemon's killing himself for love of Antigone reveals greater warmth of humanity. Their courage (of different kinds) is contrasted with Ismene's cowardly fear of pain and punishment, and the queen Eurydice's total passivity ("She will go on knitting all through the play till the time comes for her to go to her room and die"). Yet another response to life is that of Creon who equates idealism with irresponsibility and regards expediency as a virtue, but who is intelligent enough to realise that people like him will always be trapped "in the backroom, in the kitchen of politics". Finally there is the brute, earthy, unthinking world of the Guards : they carry out their orders, play cards, worry about money, make coarse jokes about women, and treat both idealism and politics with supreme unconcern. They are "eternally indifferent, for nothing that happens can matter to them" ; ironically, their perfect equanimity is due to the absence of all those spiritual, intellectual and emotional qualities which make life worth living.

Anouilh's 'Antigone' therefore explores the multiple ways in which men respond to the exigencies of life. If one is alive to the nuances of the action, it becomes difficult to decide which attitude is supposed to be the more constructive. If it is absurd to try to impose one's will on an uncaring universe as Antigone and Haemon do, it is equally absurd to abdicate the human freedom to shape at least one's own life, if nothing else, as Creon does. Anouilh's theatrical ploy of making his characters conscious of the ultimate futility of their decisions heightens the absurdity (which is also in a sense tragic) of thinking, feeling human beings struggling to express themselves in the trap that the universe has set for them : as the final Chorus puts

it—"All those who were meant to die have died : those who believed one thing, those who believed the contrary thing, and even those who believed nothing at all, yet were caught up in the web without knowing why." Nevertheless, though the choices for idealism or pragmatism are, in their different ways, equally painful for the people concerned, on balance, because we are human, it is better to be aware and to fight life on one's own terms like Antigone and Haemon and Creon, than to be afraid or unaware like Ismene and Eurydice and the Guards. Critics who interpret the play as a victory for Antigone, or less frequently, as a victory for Creon, miss the complexity of this total pattern. 'Antigone' was probably given the subtitle of "Tragedy" by the playwright because of the ultimate inevitability of the consequences which flow from Antigone's initial decision to defy Creon, in spite of the fact that Creon tries his best to avert those consequences. However, it is also Anouilh's most serious play on his own terms, for it is in this play that he comes closest to the vision of life that he commended in Molière.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. See John Harvey, 'Anouilh, A Study in Theatrics' (Yale U. P., New Haven and London, 1964), pp. 4-6 ; L. C. Pronko, 'The World of Jean Anouilh' (U. of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1961), p. 132 ; Philip Thody, 'Anouilh' (Oliver & Boyd, Edinburgh and London, 1968), p. 3.
2. The only radical change that Anouilh makes to an established story is in 'L' Alouette', where Joan of Arc is not finally burnt at the stake. He explains the unconventional ending as demonstrating his unorthodox view of Joan as a patriot, as opposed to the usual idea of Joan as Christian martyr. See his "Mystère de Jeanne". Quoted in Pol Vandromme, 'Jean Anouilh, un auteur et ses personnages' (La Table Ronde, Paris, 1965), pp. 235-237.
3. See Anouilh's essay in defence of his 'La Valse des toreadors' in 'Opéra' (March 7, 1951).
4. *ibid.*
5. Quoted in Vandromme, *op. cit.*, p. 225.
6. Quoted in Vandromme, *op. cit.*, pp. 239-240.
7. Anouilh acknowledges Giraudoux as his master in "Hommage à Giraudoux" ; ('Chronique de Paris', February 1944).

8. Quoted from article in 'Opéra' op. cit.
9. Anouilh, 'Les Nouvelles Littéraires', January 10, 1946.
10. Anouilh, "Du chapitre des 'Chaises'", 'Le Figaro', Paris, April 23, 1956.
11. Quoted in Vandromme, op. cit., pp. 141, 143.
12. See S. John, "Obsession and Technique in the Plays of Jean Anouilh", 'French Studies', Vol. XI, No. 2, April 1957, p. 105 ; Gabriel Marcel, "De Jézabel a Médée, le tragique chez Jean Anouilh", 'Revue de Paris', June 1949, pp. 99-100.
13. Interview by Melinda Camber Porter, "Jean Anouilh, Playwright in Exile", 'The Times', January 28, 1976, p. 9.
14. Hubert Gignoux, 'Jean Anouilh', (Editions du Temps Present, Paris, 1946), p. 113.
15. See E. O. Marsh, 'Jean Anouilh, Poet of Pierrot and Pantaloon' (W. H. Allen, London, 1953) p. 110 ; P. Ginestier, 'Jean Anouilh' (Edition Seghers, Paris, 1969), p. 75 ; Jean Didier, 'A la rencontre de Jean Anouilh' (La Sixaine, Paris, 1946), p. 40 ; John Fletcher ed., 'Forces in Modern French Drama', (U. of London Press, London, 1972), p. 90.

All quotations from Anouilh's 'Antigone' are taken from the translation by Lewis Galantiere (Eyre Methuen Ltd., London, 1960). Quotations from Sophocles' "Antigone" are from translation by R. C. Jebb (Cambridge U. P., 1888).

LYLY'S PROSE STYLE : *EUPHUES, THE ANATOMY*  
*OF WIT AND EUPHUES AND HIS ENGLAND*

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NANDINI DAS (SEN)

The term *Euphuism* is usually regarded as an artificial mode of style which has been discarded long since. Euphuism is a matter wholly of form, a conscious, technical art, determined by the presence of certain mechanical devices of style—among them are antithesis and parallel structure—enforced by alliteration together with the employment of a definite kind of illustration and a preference for rhetorical figures. It is a combination of anecdotes and allusions to historical personages and classical mythology, natural history (medicine, magic, popular belief) and a perpetual introduction of proverbs and pithy sayings. Euphuism represents the general tendency to write with charm and precision and with ornament at a time when Englishmen desired “to hear finer speech than the language would allow”<sup>1</sup> and much of this is conscious artistry. Broadly speaking, Euphuism denotes the common Elizabethan habit of playing with words, fancies and conceits.

This style of writing was not original with Lyly although he deserves credit for turning it to a new degree of artificiality and elegance. As a vernacular style it had been developing throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance, particularly through the study and practice of rhetoric in the schools and universities.

A question that naturally comes to the mind of every reader is : why did Lyly choose this particular style ? For a long time Latin was esteemed as the sanctioned language among the scholars and the learned. But as one approaches the end of the 16th century one sees that English has slowly won recognition as a language of serious thought. Lyly's euphuism was perhaps a deliberate attempt to show that the English language which was supposed to be vulgar was capable of style. At the beginning of the Renaissance, rhetoric

replaced logic as the principal subject of study at the universities and style became an end in itself. Along with the eager exploitation of the literature of Greece and Rome in English grammar schools, there was a keen interest in this subject, once a favourite with classical writers. The rhetorical ideals of the time, the pursuit of "eloquence", led to an insistent demand for a manner of writing heightened by artifice. This may also be an explanation of Lyly's choice of a style in which emphasis was put on an elaborately formal and artificial manner of writing.

Lyly aims at precision and emphasis by carefully balancing his words and phrases, by using rhetorical questions, by alliteration and word-play. For ornament he turned mainly to allusions and similes of various kinds drawn from Pliny and Plutarch and to knowledge derived from folklore, medicine and magic. This mixture of quaint device and native science resulted in a style which became fashionable in England in the late 16th and early 17th centuries.

The first feature that draws our attention in Lyly's prose style is that the sentence-structures are antithetical, reminiscent of a debate. Neatly balanced clauses are placed one after another giving the impression of a conscious artistry. The description of Euphues at the beginning of *Euphues, the Anatomy of Wit* will make this point clear :

"This young gallant of more wit than wealth, and yet of more wealth than wisdom, seeing himself inferior to none in pleasant conceits, thought himself so apt to all things, that he gave himself almost to nothing, but practising of those things commonly which are incident to these sharp wits, fine phrases, smooth quipping, merry taunting, using jesting without mean, and abusing mirth without measure."<sup>2</sup>

That we are to expect a specific, precise description is indicated by the opening word "this". The first phrase ("This young gallant of more wit than wealth") is immediately followed by another phrase ("and yet of more wealth than wisdom") which modifies the previous one. The description quoted above which consists of one long sentence ends with another antithetical modification ("using jesting without mean and abusing mirth without measure"). The description of the hero is continued in the same vein: The "wantonness of his

will" is made to look like a natural thing for it has its parallels in the world of nature (Rose-prickle ; velvet-brack ; fairest flower-bran). The sense of balance is seen once again in the careful choice of the two adjectives - " ...*some* men write and *most* men believe...". With these words Lyly lapses again into that "as...so" structure, this time to draw, first, upon classical mythology—Venus-mole ; Helen-scar ; Aristippus-wart ; Lycurgus-wen ; —and secondly, historical personages—Alexander-*vallant*, given to wine ; Tully-eloquent, *vainglorious* ; Solomon-*wise*, *wanton* ; David-*holy*, *homicide*. (the use of antithesis and alliteration is seen here in the choice of the phrases)

Euphues now goes to Naples where the wantonness of his will makes him lose all sense of proportion as he plunges into that life of ease and pleasure. Eubulus, the old man of Naples, had taken an instant liking for the young man. Fearing that Euphues will soon face a moral degradation, he meets him and tries to give him some well-intentioned advice. The debate-form is best expressed by the speech of Eubulus. Closely following the debate-form, it begins with a brief *introduction* (*exordium*) which contains an explanation of the old man's motive in thus addressing and advising Euphues. He confesses that although he lacks the authority to command Euphues, his good intentions should speak for themselves and make Euphues believe him. The style is formal, courtly and elaborately polite :

"Young gentleman, although my acquaintance be small to entreat you, and my authority less to command you, yet my good will in giving you good counsel should induce you to believe me, and my hoary hairs (ambassadors of experience) enforce you to follow me, for by how much the more I am a stranger to you, by so much the more you are beholding to me, having therefore opportunity to utter my mind, I mean to be importunate with you to follow my meaning."<sup>8</sup>

The style here is reminiscent of the precise description of Euphues at the opening of the book. Clauses and sentences are once again neatly balanced. The two initial clauses in Eubulus' speech are modified by *yet* acting as a signal and preparing us for a change of sentiments which appear in graded forms—first as a persuasion



("induce"), then as an enforcement ("enforce"), leading to two comparable states which are apparently dissimilar :

"Alas Euphues by how much the more I love the high climbing of thy capacity, by so much the more I fear thy fall."

All this formality fails to hide the fact that the old gentleman sincerely wanted Euphues to take his advice and restrain himself. In fact, the formality here is in itself a pointer to make Euphues realize that what the old man will say in the course of his speech is a warning to him.

The introduction is followed by *narration* (*narratio*)<sup>4</sup> which gives us the old man's opinion of the parents of Euphues who could have stopped this young man from coming to Naples and who could have shaped his wit in a better way : "But things past, are past calling again" and to substantiate this, Eubulus brings in allusions from classical legend and mythology. The plights of these men should also serve as a warning to Euphues who still has a chance to save himself. We have here the tone of a debate – a stating of pros and cons leading ultimately to the conclusion.

In the *peroratio*<sup>5</sup>, Euphues is advised to understand clearly the distinction between wit and wisdom, love and lust, and asked to serve, love and fear God : "God will bless Euphues", says Eubulus.

Euphues in his reply to Eubulus begins on an equally formal note : "I am neither so suspicious to mistrust your good will, not so sottish to dislike your good counsel, as I am therefore to thank you for the first..."<sup>6</sup>

The co-ordinators ("nor...neither") produce an impression of deliberate casualness. The speech is formal and justly so, for Euphues remembers the age of the man to whom the speech is addressed. At the same time he also makes it clear (as politely as possible yet without mincing matters) that he will not tolerate any interference so far as his personal matters are concerned. This is why the speech is polite, to a certain extent artificial and makes use of carefully balanced structures.

Some sections of the speech are reminiscent of legal jargon – a complex combination of clauses and modifications – "...whereas you argue I know not upon what probabilities, but sure I am upon no proof, that my bringing up should be a blemish to my birth."<sup>6</sup>

In this speech of Euphues, once again we have an instance of antithesis : here the contrast between youth and age is reflected in the short antithetical sentence-patterns :

"Put you no difference between the *young flourishing* Bay tree, and the *old withered* Beech ? No kind of distinction between the *waxing* and *waning* of the moon ? And between the *rising* and the *setting* of the sun ?"..."<sup>7</sup> Euphues goes on in this antithetical vein using rhetorical questions which further emphasise and establish the intended contrast. The paragraph ends with an emphatic statement, once again displaying an arrangement of contrasted words :

"You *careful*, we *careless*, we *bold*, you *fearful*, we in all points *contrary* unto you, and ye in all points *unlike* unto us."<sup>8</sup> The contrariety is also apparent in the very structure of this brief paragraph.

Will it be logical then to say that the basic antithesis in Euphues' character which is brought out at the very beginning—"This young gallant, of more wit than wealth, and yet of more wealth, than wisdom..."—is always emphasised not only through his actions but also through the style in which these actions are described ? That Euphues is a contradiction in himself is once again conveyed to us, among other things, by the words of Eubulus after Euphues has left him, not wishing to listen to his counsel :

"Seeing thou wilt not buy counsel at the first hand good cheap, thou shalt buy repentance at the second hand, at such an unreasonable rate..."<sup>9</sup>

The tone of Euphues' speech (his reply to the old man), however, is not without subtle shades of variation which save it from becoming monotonous. In the course of his speech, Euphues tries to refute, one by one, each of the 'charges' of Eubulus. While doing this work of a 'defence counsel', Euphues slowly works himself up to an excited state of mind so that at the end of his speech, he forgets himself and we find him discarding the elaborately polite manner as he says : "The Bird Taurus hath a great voice, but a small body, the thunder a great clap, yet but a little stone, the empty vessel giveth a great sound, than the full barrell."<sup>10</sup>

The implications of this insult is quite obvious but Euphues goes one step further to make himself even more explicit as he abruptly departs from the old man leaving him "in a great quandarie ...":

"I mean not to apply it, but look into yourself and you shall certainly find it, and thus I leave seeking it ..."<sup>10</sup>

Euphues turns to a series of rhetorical questions in order to prove the inevitability, logicity and naturalness of his own actions: "... who so severe as the stoics which like stocks were moved with no melody? Who so secure as the Epicures which wallowed in all kinds of licentiousness?..."<sup>11</sup>

Euphues continues in this way in his effort to make Eubulus understand that he (Euphues) can never change his nature under any circumstance:

"Do you not know that which all men do affirm and know, that black will take no other colour? That the stone Abestone being once made hot will never be made cold? That fire cannot be forced downward? That nature will have course after kind? That every thing will dispose itself according to Natures? Can the Aethiope change or alter his skin? or the leopard his hew? Is it possible to gather greaps of thorns, or figs of thistles? or to cause anything to strive against nature?"<sup>12</sup>

It is not difficult to imagine that with each question the speaker is becoming more involved in the issue and the last question comes as a climax to his arguments. Thus saying, Euphues walks away disregarding Eubulus' advice. He meets Lucilla, who is bethrothed to his friend Philautus and falls in love with her. Love proves to be stronger than the bonds of friendship and Euphues slyly plans to woo Lucilla. He manages to meet her alone and confesses his feelings for her. Lucilla, a shrewd girl, does not yield so easily although she too is attracted by Euphues. In her speech, one finds a juxtaposition of contrasted ideas:

"Certes as you have made mine ears glow at the rehearsal of your love, so have you galled my heart with the remembrance of your folly".<sup>13</sup>

The structural pattern of "though ... yet" may also be regarded as an extension of this structure: "Though you came to Naples as

a stranger, yet were you welcome to my father's house as a friend".<sup>13</sup>

One is reminded of a close parallel of this style which Lyly used in *Euphues and his England* where we have juxtaposition of two comparable states :

"If travellers in this our age were as wary of their conditions, as they be venterous of their bodies, or as willing to reap profit by their pains, as they are to endure peril for their pleasure, they would *either* prefer their own toil before a strange land, *or* good counsel before their own conceit".<sup>14</sup> [The argumentative tone of a debate intrudes with the introduction of the "either ... or" pattern.]

Besides antithesis, another figure of speech—irony is effectively used by Lyly. Thus irony plays a part in Lucilla's speech to Euphues as she herself gives us a perfect picture of her own nature under the cover of chiding and playfully accusing Euphues. She is, of course, unaware of the implications of her words. It is certainly ironically appropriate that Lucilla should use the common images usually associated with deceit—"When the fox preacheth the geese perish. The crocodile shroudeth greatest treason under most pitiful tears : in a kissing mouth there lieth a galling mind"<sup>15</sup> — when she is going to prove the truth of this through her own actions in future. The antithetical structures in her speech suggest her own dissembling nature which is as yet not conspicuous. Even at the stage, however, her "encouragement" of Euphues and the way she eggs him on gives us a hint of her true nature. When she accuses Euphues of "wanton glances", "subtle shifts", "painted practices", she is also describing herself.

The other figure of speech (Alliteration) used by Lyly is also to be seen in Lucilla's reflections on love when she employs alliteration and says :

"Let my father use what speeches he *lyst*, I will follow mine own *lust*".<sup>16</sup> One also notices that there is an implied pun on the two words *lyst* and *lust* and the careful placing of these words at the end of each sentence not only emphasises the speaker's intention but also suggests that it is a linguistically conscious artist who is at work.



Lucilla and Euphues enjoy their clandestine relationship till her father Ferado comes back from Venice. He wishes to finalise his daughter's marriage and in his speech, we have the use of contrasted words and then of phrases — both being variants of antithesis :

"Dear daughter, as thou hadst long time lived a *maiden*, so now thou must learn to be a *mother*, and as I have been careful to bring thee up a *virgin*, so am I now desirous to make thee a *wife*".<sup>17</sup>

"...where the match is made rather by the *compulsion of the parents*, than by *consent of the parties* ..."<sup>18</sup>

The antithesis used here shows the shrewdness of the speaker — that "although he were thoroughly angry [ at Lucilla's reluctance to get married ], yet he dissembled his fury, to the end that he might by craft discover her fancy ... "<sup>18</sup> The careful selection and placing of words make it clear that Ferado was trying "to sift his daughter with his device".<sup>18</sup> The "device" is continued with Ferado's use of a series of antithetical sentences all beginning with "If" :

"If he be base thy blood will make him noble, if beggarly thy goods shall make him wealthy, if a stranger, thy freedom may enfranchise him ..."<sup>19</sup> All these are means to catch Lucilla un-awares and to persuade her to tell her secret. Lucilla, however, shows surprising intelligence and sees through her father —

"Lucilla perceiving the drift of the old fox her father, weighed with herself what was best to be done..."<sup>19</sup> (The image of the fox as a traditional figure of cunning and slyness reminds us of Lucilla's use of the same image to symbolise deceit in one of her speeches to Euphues—a speech that has already been referred to).

No comment on Lyly's prose style would be complete without referring to imagery which is derived from various sources like chess, medical metaphor, comparison between love and the fig tree. In the opening description of Euphues, Lyly appropriately uses an imagery of horsemanship to characterise the wit of the hero. It is the rashness of the young man that leads him to his destruction.

Euphues has the freedom to make his own choice :

"...and having the bridle in his own hands, either to use the reign or the spur, disdaining counsel, leaving his country, loathing his old acquaintance, thought either by wit to obey some conquest, or

Mr. Eang, the police-court magistrate. Mr. Fang's summary dispensation of justice to Oliver brings out the truth that the magistrate like him is shallow, unfeeling and empty-headed and, for that reason, is in the habit of exercising the power arbitrarily. In *David Copperfield* Dickens takes us into the Doctors' Commons which is "the most conveniently organised place in the world. It was the complete idea of smugness".<sup>18</sup> It is moreover a happy hunting-ground of the legal touts and hangers-on...<sup>19</sup>

*Pickwick Papers*, *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield* offer, however, stray satiric comments on the corrupt and rotten legal system of Victorian England. It is in *Bleak House* that Dickens draws our attention straightway to the weaknesses of the Court of Chancery, for "the heart of the story is a Chancery suit. On this the plot hinges".<sup>20</sup> For a long time public attention remained focussed on its unnecessary delays, endless and enormous costs, unceasingly renewable counter-suits and appeals and fatiguing, complicated legal procedures. In analysing and at the same time criticizing the limitations of the Court of Chancery, Dickens blends fact with fiction. For example, the case of Gridley, "the man from Shropshire" is based on "one of actual occurrence, made public by a disinterested person who was professionally acquainted with the whole of the monstrous wrong from beginning to end".<sup>21</sup> Similarly, the number of years and the volume of human energy and labour which the Jaradyce and Jarndyce, involves, and the total amount of money, thought to have been expended on it,<sup>22</sup> are, as we come to know from the author's preface, neither an exaggeration of the reality, nor a pure concoction on the part of the novelist.<sup>23</sup>

While dwelling on these drawbacks of the Chancery Dickens also asserts that its meaningless delay and complicated procedures have ruined the life of many individuals. There are, for example, half-insane and illiterate Krook who always poses to be the Lord Chancellor, the frustrated Miss Flite who is driven half crazy and Richard Carston who depends a lot on the final verdict of the suit and, consequently, pays a penalty for it by undergoing a moral deterioration.

Dickens's angry indictment of the sluggishness of the Court of Chancery is repeated in the description of the Circumlocution Office

The themes Dickens chooses in his novels to speak against the social evils of his time are, if not unlimited, at least of multiple interests. Dickens's experience as a parliamentary reporter and his long, intimate association with Carlyle led him to look upon the parliamentary system of government with derision. It is not that he has no regard for democratic rule; nor, like Carlyle, has he ever cherished the idea that parliament should be totally abolished in order to welcome the benevolent despotism of a dictator-hero. He satirises this system of administration because he thinks that the way it functions can do no positive good to the people. Even quite early in his literary career, Dickens gives a half-jocular, half-satirical description of Eatanswill Election ... <sup>16</sup>.

But Dickens's invective at the politicians of his time in *Pickwick Papers* is merely good-humored and mildly satirical. *Bleak House*, written in the middle period of his life, suggests that the political power in the hands of the politicians is nothing but an instrument to gratify their self-interests. As the poor people at Tom-All-Alone's and St. Alban's suffer in the midst of indescribable poverty, Lord Boodle comes to tell Sir Leicester Dedlock: "...supposing the present government to be overthrown, the limited choice of the Crown, in the formation of a new Ministry, would be between Lord Coodle and Sir Thomas Doodle—supposing it to be impossible for the Duke of Foodle to act with Coodle, which may be assumed to be the case of consequence of the breach arising out of the affair with Hoodle. Then, giving the Home Department and the Leadership of the House of Commons to Joodle, the Exchequer to Koodle, the colonies to Loodle, and the Foreign Office to Moodle, what are you to do with Noodle?... That the country is shipwrecked, lost and gone to pieces ... because you can't provide for Noodle".<sup>17</sup>

But in *Bleak House* Dickens's indictment against the court of Chancery in particular and against the lawyers in general is more severe and cutting than that against the power-loving and dishonest politicians. The novels, preceding *Bleak House*, show that their author has the least regard for the slyness and cunning wisdom of the legal practitioners. In *Pickwick Papers* Dickens records his eloquent protest against the English legal system when he depicts the dubious figures of Dodson and Fogg. The theme of legal injustice is also taken up in *Oliver Twist*, as Dickens introduces the figure of

healthy place of habitation was one of the factors contributing to the proper development of a man's mental health. The bad conditions prevailing in the urban slum area not only make a man wretched but also produce boys of criminal propensity like the Artful Dodger. Dickens, the reformist, thus suggests that outside the parish workhouse, there is a bigger workhouse, the city of London, dwarfing the normal growth of men who inhabit its foul areas.

*Nicholas Nickleby* concentrates on the worst abuses that the state's lack of concern about education produced. G. M. Young has noted that in the thirties of the nineteenth century a "survey of elementary education ... revealed to thoughtful contemporaries a profoundly disquieting picture ..." <sup>13</sup> Most of the schoolbuildings were far from good, and in nearly all the cases, thoroughly bad. The teachers were also neither qualified nor competent. Dickens's preface to the first edition of *Nicholas Nickleby* records that he was conscious of this problem "of the monstrous neglect of education in England ..." <sup>14</sup> In *Nicholas Nickleby* Dickens, however, does not deal, in general, with the dismal state of affairs in the field of education, but concentrates specifically on the notorious dungeon-like boarding schools in Yorkshire. Dickens had heard of the painful cruelties inflicted on the young boarders of these institutions since his childhood. In order to verify the authenticity of what he had already heard and to collect materials for the forthcoming novel, before the Christmas of 1837, he took a trip to Yorkshire with his friend Hablot Browne. The trip resulted in the depiction of the Dotheboys Hall, of the 'young gentlemen' and of Mr. Squeers, the proprietor and master of this school.

The description of the Dotheboys Hall occupies nearly one-tenth of the entire novel. As usual, while describing Mr. Squeers and his establishment, Dickens employs the biting bitterness of his satire. Nicholas, soon after his arrival at Dotheboys as an assistant master, discovers that everything of this institution is marked by inhuman cruelty. Mr. Squeers, in the name of "the practical mode of teaching", virtually uses his helpless victims as household drudges ... <sup>15</sup> The consequence of this sort of educational system, Dickens broadly hints, is that it sucks out the very vitality of those tutored under it. It dehumanises its victims and makes them mentally and physically crippled.



the floor all day, without the inconvenience of too much food or too much clothing under the parental superintendence of an elderly female...."<sup>7</sup> At the age of nine he was taken away from the custody of the 'elderly female', Mrs. Mann, by Mr. Bumble, the parish beadle, who seemed to represent the monstrous indifference and the heartless cruelty of the workhouse officials. The little Oliver was placed before the members of the board and they asked him to pick oakum from six 'o clock in the morning because, Dickens observes, the "members of this board were very sage, deep, philosophical men; and when they came to turn their attention to the work-house, they found out at once, what ordinary folks would never have discovered—the poor people liked it. It was a regular place of public entertainment for the poorer classes; a tavern where there was nothing to pay; a public breakfast, dinner, tea and supper all the year round; a brick and mortar elysium where it was all play and no work.... So, they established the rule, that all poor people should have the alternative (for they would compel nobody, not they), of being starved by a gradual process in the house, or by a quick one out of it..."<sup>8</sup>

Dickens suggests that these men were responsible for stunting both the physical and the mental growth of the poor little orphans because they treated the boys like drudges and denied them all claim to live like men. In Chapter II Dickens describes quite movingly the punishments, inflicted upon Oliver because of his startling audacity to ask for more than what was normally allotted for his daily meal, "...three meals of thin gruel a day, with an onion twice a week and half a roll on Sundays."<sup>9</sup> All these explain Dickens's observation that it "cannot be expected that this system of farming would produce any very extraordinary or luxuriant crop."<sup>10</sup> It shows why Oliver's eyes "had glistened at the mention of meat".<sup>11</sup>

From the oppressed and exploited world of the unfortunate victims of Poor Law we get ourselves transferred to the foul areas of St. Giles and Saffron Hill and the slums of Whitechapel, Rotherhithe and Bethnal Green. Dickens gives us here out of the storehouse of his experiences of early youth, a faithful representation of "...the foul and frowzy dens...the haunts of hunger and disease, the shabby rags that scarcely hold together...."<sup>12</sup> Indeed, Dickens remains faithful to the demands of realism because he believed that a good and

possession of either legitimate or illegitimate children constituted a claim to extra financial assistance. The men opposed to the old Poor Law apprehended that the present state of affairs would remain not only confined to the agricultural labourers but would also cover a large body of industrial workers who would quite deliberately follow the course of pauperism.

The New Poor Law of 1834 aimed at the removal of all the drawbacks of the Old Law. For the able-bodied men, instead of the weekly allowance, it now made a provision for work, as it intended to take care of the aged, the sick and the truly indigent much better than before. For this purpose it made a "strict segregation of the different classes of paupers, and the care of them, preferably in different institutions".<sup>6</sup> The administration and the execution of the Poor Law Amendment Act, 1834 depended at the upper level on a Commission consisting of one Commissioner and two Assistant Commissioners and, at the lower, on the parish unions run and controlled by the boards of guardians elected on a rate-paying franchise.

From a theoretical point of view the new poor law tried to make a distinction between the really poor, the helpless, and the men and women who deliberately chose to be poor. But in practice the same workhouse accommodated the idler, the drunkard and the prostitute on the one hand and the aged, the ill, the infirm and the foundling children on the other. It had the worst effect specially on the children. Either badly educated or receiving no education at all, they had to keep company with persons of doubtful character and in most of the cases to lead a life of abject slavery under a cruel master like Mr Gamfield in *Oliver Twist*.

In the first few chapters of *Oliver Twist* Dickens shows his awareness of the evils of the New Poor Law. Oliver, no doubt, was born under the old system, but by the time he passed through his infancy to reach childhood, the New Law came into effect. And Dickens shows with all the strength and ferocity of his satiric attacks that the guardians of the parish-unions under the reformed system were as inhuman and as indifferent to the sufferings of the orphans as the administrators of the previous Law. When Oliver became a little older, the workhouse officials sent him to a 'farm' "where twenty or thirty other offenders against the poor laws, rolled about

Like many members of the Victorian middle class Dickens was a liberal and a philanthropist, and his liberalism was in no way different from that of the average Victorian. For, like the middle-class liberals of his own time, he noticed that the volume and extent of the social evils were too alarming, and for this, while sharing the reformist zeal of the contemporary bourgeoisie, he raged "with flaming words against the sins of society, the heartlessness and the insolence of the rich, the harshness and the lack of sympathy of the law, the cruel treatment of the children, the inhuman conditions in the prisons, factories".<sup>3</sup> The intention was not only to take up the cudgels against them but at the same time to draw the attention of men in the country's administration for their immediate redress and solution.

Dickens started to appear in the role of a middle-class reformist from the very beginning of his literary career. *Pickwick Papers*, his first novel, in spite of its comic hilarity, is interspersed with incidents that seem to emphasize the theme of social injustice. In the narration of the immortal case of Bardell versus Pickwick.<sup>3</sup> Dickens points out the slyness of the legal practitioners and with the clapping of Mr. Pickwick in the debtors' prison the whole book deepens "with a new dimension of seriousness".<sup>4</sup>

With *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby* Dickens, however, continued to criticise vigorously some of the specific social abuses because he believed that a strong and scathing criticism of these evils would contribute a great deal to the improvement of the social life in England. *Oliver Twist* is the history of a workhouse child, brought up by the parish overseers and nothing which is not in keeping with this design, has been introduced in the novel.<sup>5</sup> In stating the theme of the novel Dickens has brought to the limelight the two specific social abuses—the workhouse system for the pauper under the New Poor Law, 1834 and the squalid and fetid dwelling-places of the poor where leading a happy and an honest life was impossible. The Poor Law was one of the most intractable problems that beset England at the very beginning of the nineteenth century. The Law, originally made during the reign of Queen Elizabeth and commonly known as the 'allowance system', was in the nineteenth century held to be destructive of the independence, the industrious habits and the morals of the rural labourers—the last because the

## THE INFLUENCE OF THE MIDDLE CLASS ON DICKENS'S NOVELS

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DEBIPRASAD BHATTACHARYA

Dickens had as the primary source-material for his novels the Victorian England out of which he created a world of his own supposed to be as varied and complete as the original one. He had in mind a society which was dominated in the main by the industrial and commercial bourgeoisie and the background of his novels was essentially middle-class. His art as a novelist is coloured and conditioned by it. His social views and his outlook on life reflect the limitations and contradictions of the class he has represented in his works ; they cannot be separated from the social milieu in which he gained his experiences. Dickens's novels embodying his views can best be understood by the study of the middle-class surroundings in which he was born and brought up.

Dickens's childhood and early youth were spent in lower middle-class surroundings. Later in his life as a child-worker at a blacking factory, as a lawyer's clerk and as a parliamentary reporter for the famous dailies he happened to come across a self-centred generation of the English middle class. Their selfish commercialism and greed, their insularity and false vanity, their callous indifference to the problems of the community and their parasitic tendency did not pass unnoticed by him. Dickens, however, is neither a cynic nor a professional fault-finder, and, therefore, despite his exposure of the vices and shortcomings in the character of the Victorian middle class he, as an artist, was committed to their aims and aspirations, ideals and ideologies. As a novelist he represents this particular social group not merely because his novels abound in such characters, but chiefly because, as Orwell puts it, "more completely than most writers, Dickens can be explained in terms of his social origin".<sup>1</sup>

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22. *ibid* p. 195.
  23. *ibid* p. 201.
  24. *ibid* p. 205.
  25. *ibid* p. 210.
  26. *ibid* p. 213.
  27. *ibid* p. 201.
  28. In a different context the image of bear-baiting reminds one of *Macbeth*:  
"They have tied me to a stake : I cannot fly, But, bear-like, I must fight  
the course." (V. 7. 11. 1-2).
  29. *Euphues* p. 208.
  30. *Euphues* p. 213.
  31. *ibid* p. 202.
  32. *ibid* p. 208
  33. *ibid* p. 185.
  34. *ibid* p. 187.
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with diligence it be instructed in youth, will with industry use those qualities in his age."<sup>84</sup>

The repetition of the wax-image thus prepares us for this "fault" in the hero's character—a defect that eventually leads to his misery. The intended marriage between Euphues and Lucilla never takes place. The apprehensions of Eubulus are all proved to be true and the book ends with Euphues left all alone: he is indeed a sadder and a wiser man who learns things the hard way.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. *Euphues and His England* ed. Bond p. 10.
2. *Euphues and the Anatomy of Wit* ed. Bond p. 184.
3. *ibid* p. 187.
4. A short statement of the facts of the case in a debate. This is the second stage in a debate which opens with the introduction or *exordium*.
5. The conclusion (to the debate) which may consist of a summing up (*enumeratio*) of the main points or an amplification (*amplificatio*) of the points already made by the speaker or an appeal to the audience (*conquestio/commiseratio*). Eubulus at the end of his speech stresses the main points.
6. *Euphues, the Anatomy of Wit* p. 190.
7. *ibid* p. 192.
8. *ibid* p. 193.
9. *ibid* p. 195.
10. *ibid* p. 194.
11. *ibid* p. 190.
12. *ibid* pp. 191-192.
13. *ibid* p. 220.
14. *Euphues and His England* p. 13.
15. *Euphues, the Anatomy of Wit* p. 220.
16. *ibid* p. 207.
17. *ibid* p. 227.
18. *ibid* p. 229.
19. *ibid* p. 230.
20. *ibid* p. 185.
21. *ibid* p. 189.

transgressed the bonds of friendship, for Philautus was already engaged to Lucilla. He fervently wishes here that love was a disease which could be successfully cured by medicine :

"And can men by no herb, or by no art, by no way procure a remedy for the impatient disease of love ?"<sup>80</sup>

To Euphues love becomes "a desperate disease"<sup>80</sup> when he makes an attempt to keep his love a secret from Philautus.

Euphues thinks of feminine beauty in terms of a bait/hook—love is nothing but a state of blindness—and inability to judge correctly :

"Do we not commonly see that in painted pots is hidden the deadliest poison ? That in the greenest grass in the greatest serpent ?..."<sup>81</sup>

Euphues makes a parallel between love and the fig tree :

"Ah well I perceive that love is not unlike the Fig tree, whose fruit is sweet, whose root is more bitter than the claw of a Bitter, or like the Apple in Persia, whose blossom savureth like honey, whose bud is more sour than gall."<sup>82</sup>

The comparison involves the inherent paradox that one must face in love—the joys and sorrows, disappointment and pleasure, delights as well as turbulations.

It is interesting that among the different types of imagery, the wax-image should be re-iterated throughout *Euphues and the Anatomy of Wit* Euphues wit is "like wax" and hints are given to us from the very beginning—that it is liable to melt and dissolve in the face of strong outside influence. Eubulus in his speech to Euphues uses the wax-image to caution the young man who can easily be swayed by the attraction of Naples.

"Did they [the parents of Euphues] not remember that which no man ought to forget, that the tender youth of a child is like the tempering of new wax apt to receive any form ?"<sup>83</sup>

This is further strengthened by the use of two more images—that of clay and of iron which can be moulded in any direction when it is hot :

"The potter fashioneth his clay when it is soft... As therefore the iron being hot receiveth any form with the stroke of the hammer, and keepeth it being cold for ever, so the tender wit of a child if

It is a case of love at first sight. The imagery suggests once again his impetuosity, his easily swayed nature, prone to influences of outside forces. The fire imagery is also used to express Lucilla's feelings towards Euphues after Euphues and Philautus leave the women :

"...Lucilla...now began to fry in the flames of love..."<sup>24</sup>

The imagery serves the same purpose as in the case of Euphues—to emphasize the intensity, impetuosity and lack of reason of Lucilla (the alliterative phrase producing a rather comical effect—"to fry in the flames of love...").

The same imagery describes the suppressed emotions of Euphues since, as yet, he is not in a position, to profess his love to Lucilla :

"Well, well, seeing the wound that bleedeth inward is most dangerous, that the fire kept close burneth most furious..."<sup>25</sup>

Euphues, trying to conceal the reason of his anguish, from Philautus, pretends to be in love with Lyvia, the companion of Lucilla. Speaking of Lyvia, he says :

"Doubtless if ever she herself have been scorched with the flames of desire, she will be ready to quench the coals with courtesy in another..."<sup>26</sup>

In all these instances there is a parallel between fire and passion.

After supper, (in Lucilla's house, during Ferardo's absence) following the custom of Naples, Philautus was requested to make a speech. He declined the offer and asked Euphues to say something. "Euphues being thus *tied to the stake* by their importunate entreaty, ..." <sup>27</sup> began to speak. This imagery derived from bear-baiting (a favourite pastime of the Elizabethans) suggests a sense of imminent danger as well as a sense of helplessness—Euphues, like the hunted animal, has been tied to the stake of the charms and attractions of pretty Lucilla. He has no course left now but to yield to her wanton glances, scalding sighs and loving signs. Henceforth he will be reduced, indeed, to a slave of Lucilla and the imagery is a key to all these implications.<sup>28</sup>

Euphues in his tormented state tries to argue himself into falling out of love as he realises that by falling in love with Lucilla he has



by shame to abide some conflict, and leaving the rule of reason, rashly ran unto destruction".<sup>20</sup> (The alliteration—*rashly ran*—emphasising the inherent weakness of the wit of Euphues). We cannot, however, blame Euphues entirely for stopping at Naples. One is more inclined to believe that Euphues was weak-willed and not an outright villain: he was enticed by Naples which had the power "either to allure the mind to lust, or entice the heart to folly..."<sup>21</sup>

The wit of Euphues is also compared to objects from the world of nature:

"The fine crystal is sooner crazed than hard marble, the greenest Beech burneth faster than the dryest Oak, the fairest silk is soonest soiled, and the sweetest wine turneth to the sharpest vinegar, the pestilence doth moth rifest infect the clearest complexion, and the Caterpillar cleaveth into the ripest fruit, the most delicate wit is allured with small enticement unto vice..."<sup>22</sup> What Lyly perhaps implies is that nothing in the world of nature is free from limitations and even the wit of a young man, pure at heart, may be corrupted if his innocence is destroyed.

When Euphues goes to Naples, it is Eubulus who comes forward to caution the young man about the ways of Naples. Euphues rejects his advice and Lyly analyses the young man's wit to bring out the impetuosity, lack of clear-sightedness, too much confidence in his own wisdom and restlessness leading to the rash or hasty judgement of Euphues:

"...how lewdly wit standeth in his own light, how he deemeth no penny good silver but his own, preferring the blossom before the fruit, the bud before the flower, the green blade before the ripe ear of corn, his own wit before all men's wisdom".<sup>23</sup>

Once again Lyly turns to nature to find an analogy in describing Euphues.

It is appropriate that in his description of Euphues' emotions after he falls in love, Lyly uses the fire imagery:

"Here Euphues at the first sight was so kindled with desire, that almost he was like to burn to coals."<sup>24</sup>

in *Little Dorrit* (1857). Dickens's comment on the ponderous inertia which the Circumlocution Office imposed on the general administration of the country seemed to have been prompted by his knowledge of the bureaucratic negligence of the conditions of the soldiers on the battlefield of Crimea. The Roebuck Report of June 18, 1855 on the distressing condition of the British Army declared that the British soldiers "were exposed ... to all the sufferings and inconveniences of cold, rain, mud, and snow, on the high ground, and in the depth of winter".<sup>24</sup> The reports from the military hospital at Scutari were equally horrible. The people's representatives at the House of Commons burst out in angry protests when these reports reached England.

Dickens himself felt terribly angry and exasperated and published in the *Household Words* a series of articles on the administrative callousness of the British Government.<sup>25</sup> The mood of anger and disgust with which the articles in the *Household Words* are permeated is also present in the new novel *Little Dorrit*. In the tenth chapter of the novel Dickens emphasizes the routine-and-rule-oriented functioning of the bureaucracy :

If another Gunpowder Plot had been discovered half an hour before the lighting of the match, nobody would have been justified in saving the parliament until there had been half a score of boards, half a bushel of minutes, several sacks of official memoranda, and a family-vault full of ungrammatical correspondence on the part of the Circumlocution Office.<sup>26</sup>

Dickens ridicules its peculiar tendency not to work with smooth efficiency and observes in this connection that the administrative impassivity of the Circumlocution Office has its sanction from Parliament, the body of worthless ministers and lords.<sup>27</sup> The Circumlocution Office thus represents all the petrifying and interposing forces of society that stand in the way of the fruitful and creative impulses of man. It symbolises the coterie rule of a group of ignorant, muddle-headed and self-centered persons like the Barnacles and the Stilstalkings.

What is really interesting in Dickens's role as a bourgeois liberal is the zeal and earnestness with which he attacks the evils of the contemporary social and political institutions. Edmund Wilson in his well-known and illuminating article "Dickens: The Two

Scrooges" has called him a "rebel".<sup>88</sup> This may be accepted as an appropriate description of Dickens. As a social thinker he did always maintain a rebellious attitude to the wrongs and injustices in the social body and he sincerely wished that some positive steps should be taken by the State to remove them. But his good intention to ameliorate the society was largely governed by the middle class among whom he was born and brought up. As a result, in spite of the radical and altruistic quality of his writings, they remain in most cases idealistic, sentimental and slightly irrational and sometimes self-contradictory. Although his anger, to use the words of A.O.J. Cockshut, is "good, hot and generous"<sup>89</sup>, it is not the anger of a revolutionary.

In *Bleak House*<sup>80</sup> and in *Little Dorrit*<sup>81</sup> Dickens goes on analysing in detail the soul-killing misery and poverty of the downtrodden and exploited section of the society. He feels that these people have got sufficient ground to rise against the State machinery formed of the callous indifference of the middle-class philanthropists like Mrs. Pardiggle, the corruption of the politicians like Coodle and Doodle and the monetary greed of the landlords like Mr. Casby; but when they actually do so in *Barnaby Rudge*, he shudders at it and steps back in fear and apprehension. Again, he scoffs at the selfish and hard-hearted industrialists like Bounderby, but he never suggests that these greedy, exploiting capitalists and traders should be deprived of their right to property.

Thus his social philosophy is full of perplexing contradictions. The reason is that like many other progressive members of the Victorian middle-class Dickens looks upon the maladies of the society through feeling and not through reason, through emotion, and not through intellect. Consequently, nowhere in his writings is there the faintest suggestion that he intends to shake the foundations of the society. As a social thinker his ultimate aim is, perhaps, a change, but change not of the social order, but of the human heart.

This insistence on the change of heart, and this reformist zeal are, as Orwell put it, "alibi of people who do not wish to endanger the status quo."<sup>92</sup> Like the middle classes of his time, guided as they were by the Evangelical faith, Dickens insisted that a man

should never be mean, self-centered and dishonest. And if the individuals would behave decently, there would emerge a society where there would be "a better, physically and mentally fitter police-force, with a more paternalistic outlook ; higher wages for white and blue-collar workers ; employers, masters and wealthy patrons showing more good-will to employees, apprentices, and humble shop-keepers".<sup>83</sup>

The social philosophy of Dickens, in spite of its broad and large-hearted humanitarianism, thus baffles and bewilders the readers because they notice in it two distinctly opposite tendencies—the tendency to attack the evils of the age and at the same time to accept and make a final compromise with that particular social order after necessary changes and reforms.

## II

The characteristic tendency in Dickens's social beliefs and convictions can best be comprehended in relation to his age and at the same time to the social group he belonged to. Dickens was aware of the socio-economic developments of the Victorian period, and, possibly, of all the Victorian writers he most unfailingly grasped the spirit of the age. With the middle classes Dickens was the most favourite because they enjoyed a temperamental affinity with that great writer. In this connection we should remember that much of what goes to the making of the Victorian temper — the high seriousness, sentimentality and a strong sense of morality — were closely associated with the middle-class values in society. Dickens may be called the representative novelist of the Victorian middle class because he was well acquainted with the emotional pattern of their life ; and as he thought that "a novelist should address the entire literate nation and the great writer must be a popular writer"<sup>84</sup> the different aspects of his fictional art seem to have been in harmony with the values of life of the contemporary middle class.

The seriousness of the Victorian middle class was shared by Dickens in his attitude to art and to novel-writing in particular. All through his life he remained dedicated to his art. His sole ambition had been to make novel-writing a respectable artistic vocation. His

criticism of Thackeray that he "too much feigned a want of earnestness" and "made a pretence of undervaluing his art which was not good for the art that he held in trust"<sup>85</sup> was prompted by his consciousness that the writer of a novel should be as serious in his intention as any other literary artist.

The extreme seriousness in the Victorian middle-class character may be said to have contributed to its over-sentimental nature ; and Dickens as the most popular writer of his own day did not hesitate to make allowance for the sentimentality of his contemporaries. Indeed, to many of his contemporaries much of the appeal of the early Dickens was not unrelated to the novelist's successful handling of the sentimental scenes in *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Dombey and Son*. The sentimental strain, struck in the delineation of the death-scene of poor Smike in *Nicholas Nickleby*, sounds louder as Dickens comes down to write the famous death-scene of Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop*. The twentieth-century critics with their cold and dry rationality have derided the gushing sentimentality of his death-scenes. Aldous Huxley, for example, writes : "the overflowing of his heart drowns his head and even dims his eyes ; for, whenever he is in the melting mood, Dickens ceases to be able and probably ceases even to wish to see reality. His one and only desire on these occasions is just to overflow, nothing else. Which he does, with a vengeance and in an atrocious blank verse that is meant to be poetical prose and succeeds only in being the worst kind of fustian".<sup>86</sup> Lord David Cecil is equally severe upon Dickens in this respect and accuses him of insincerity : "He tries to wring an extra tear from the situation ... No Hollywood film-director, expert in sob-stuff, could more thoroughly vulgarise the simple and the tender".<sup>87</sup> But Dickens's contemporaries luxuriated in this free and unrestrained outlet of feeling on the part of the novelist. In England the writers and intellectuals, as representatives of the respectable and educated middle class, appreciated the mode of handling of this specific situation. Readers of such mighty stature as Edward Fitzgerald, Washington Irving, Sydney Smith, Thomas Hood, Walter Savage Landor, Thomas Carlyle and Lord Jeffrey felt enthusiastic over it and Daniel O'Connell burst into tears.<sup>88</sup>

In *Dombey and Son* Dickens repeated the performance of *The Old Curiosity Shop* and the death of Paul even overwhelmed Thackeray.<sup>39</sup> Jeffrey appreciated the scene with evident enthusiasm when he wrote on January 31, 1847, "Oh! my dear Dickens! What a No.5 you have now given us! I... cried and sobbed over it last night... Since that divine Nelly was found dead on her humble couch... there has been nothing like the actual dying of that sweet Paul."<sup>40</sup>

The habitual tendency of the novel-readers of the Victorian period was to evaluate the worth of any novelist by the general readability of his writings. It was, however, not the singular feature of the age. On the other hand, it may be said to be a part of the cultural heritage of the nineteenth from the previous century. The novels of the eighteenth-century writers — Fielding, Richardson and Goldsmith — are rich in moral suggestiveness, either implicit or explicit. The vast majority of the middle-class readers liked their novels, just as they disliked the parading of vulgarity and obscenity in the late seventeenth century English comedy and favoured the appearance of the sentimental comedy on a large scale in the first half of the eighteenth. During the Victorian period this tendency was strengthened partly due to the Evangelical impact upon the taste and manners of the middle class. It may be said that one of the reasons behind their loving regard for Dickens was that his writings satisfied their ethical taste. They exulted over the rewarding of the 'good' and the punishment of the 'bad' at the end of his works.

Orwell is particularly severe upon the enunciation of 'poetic justice' in the conclusion of some of the novels of Dickens. While expressing his dissatisfaction with this specific aspect of Dickens's art, he points out that it betrays the smug complacency of Dickens's middle-class personality :

The ideal to be striven after, then, appears to be something like this : a hundred thousand pounds, a quaint old house with plenty of ivy on it, a sweetly womanly wife, a horde of children, and no work. Everything is safe, soft, peaceful and, above all, domestic."<sup>41</sup>

But, unfortunately, Orwell has failed to notice the subtler method of the later Dickens in the dispensation of justice. The proud Mr. Dombey or the hard-hearted Mr. Gradgrind learns through the sufferings and experiences of life the prime value of humility and softer

feelings. Carker is crushed to death by a railway engine for all the acts of villainy and betrayal he has done to his master; Lady Dedlock at the cost of her own life pays the penalty for the moral offence she once committed; the mother of Arthur Clennam falls a poor victim to her own cruel and Calvinistic faith. In handling the theme of poetic justice in all these instances Dickens has exhibited the utmost care and caution; the moralist in Dickens has never intruded upon his artistic self. In these cases Dickens does not suffer from the blunt middle-class complacency of his age.

Dickens's art was thus moulded by the ethical standard of his age. In many Victorian households his novels were meant for family-reading because they never tried to offend the Victorian sense of respectability. Being a prudent artist, he showed respect for the idiosyncrasies and the moral taboos of his generation. His humour, for example, is household humour, to be enjoyed by everyone at a middle-class home because it is not generally produced at the cost of the vulgar and profane. Mr. Pickwick may, out of mistake, slip into a lady's bedroom at an Ipswich hotel, but all the offensiveness of the stock comic situation is transformed by Dickens into charming and innocent fun.<sup>43</sup> There is similarly nothing bawdy or vulgar in the madman's love-making with Mrs. Nickleby; but the very grotesqueness of the situation produces humour which may be unreservedly enjoyed by all the members of a middle-class family.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, in devising such comic situations, Dickens has not used "any incident or expression...which could call a blush into the most delicate cheek".<sup>44</sup>

Even in the dialogues of the underworld characters Dickens seems to submit himself to the dictates of the convention. There is nothing in the speech or utterances of these characters which could qualify as shocking to the taste of the Victorians. Dickens carefully avoids in the mouths of Bill Sikes and Fagin any indecent expression or oath that might "offend the ear"<sup>45</sup>. In *Our Mutual Friend* the dialogues of the riverside rogues never get sullied by any improper use of the language. In the same novel, the heroine Lizzie Hexam, notwithstanding her low social origin, lack of education and refinement, uses language which would suit any lady in any social position.

Dickens's habit of adapting himself to the conservative outlook of the middle-class readers on matters of sex has urged him frequently to depict the man-woman relationship in a peculiarly restrained and subdued fashion. In *Oliver Twist* he is unwilling to state anything explicitly about the exact relationship between Nancy and Sikes, although we know that the former is a whore and leads a disreputable life. So also, Martha, the prostitute in *David Copperfield*, has been obscured by sentiment. The same impulse once again drives him to accept Lord Jeffrey's suggestion not to allow Edith Dombey to become Carker's mistress. Because of this tendency to subscribe liberally to the moral standards of his contemporaries Dickens in *Little Dorrit* feels perhaps hesitant to define and elaborate the actual relationship between Tattycoram and Miss Wade, although one may, after going through the repentant utterances of Tattycoram in chapter sixty-nine, detect something abnormal and perverted in it.<sup>46</sup>

Indeed, it is not within Dickens's purview to portray any woman of flesh and blood. His female characters may be divided into two categories—the unattractive aged frumps and spinsters like Sally Brass in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Mrs. Sparsit in *Hard Times*, Mrs. General in *Little Dorrit* and the equally unappealing chaste heroines, adorned with maidenly coyness and an almost angelic purity of soul. To the second category belong Rose Maylie, Kate Nickleby, Madeline Bray, Little Nell, Ruth Pinch, Florence Dombey, Agnes Wickfield, Little Dorrit and Esther Summerson. These heroines of Dickens are, to borrow Sheridan's words, "too chaste to look like flesh and blood".<sup>47</sup>

The peculiarity of the Dickens heroines is that they are seldom presented before us either physically or as showing any passion. Even the provocative, tormenting Estella in *Great Expectations* has nothing of the physical or obviously passionate about her. The only exception among the Dickens heroines is Louisa Gradgrind who before her marriage with Mr. Bounderby shows her awareness of the passionate side of marriage and even hints at it to her father, while looking at the chimneys of the Coketown works.<sup>48</sup>

It is evident from the foregoing analysis that Dickens's beliefs and convictions as an artist and as a social thinker originated from the



social and moral outlook of the contemporary middle class. Some of the characteristic qualities of his writings—the reformism, the tone of seriousness and sentimentality, the broad didactic purpose of his novels, the incapacity to analyse rationally different problems of the society and a certain inhibited unwillingness to depict or describe frankly the man-woman relationship can be adequately explained in terms of his relation to his age. Middle-class ethics shaped his art and determined the outlook on life and, on ultimate analysis, he may be described as the best representative of the nineteenth-century bourgeois culture, its beliefs and convictions.

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